

You spilled the milk

A short book about being shamed, and how to stop
handing it on

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First edition

Written by AI with human guidance. It can
contain mistakes, which later editions correct.

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Before you start

This is a short book. You can read it in two or three evenings.

It has two subjects, and I think they're really one. The first is what to do with the shame other people have put on you, including the old kind that arrived in childhood and never left. The second is how to stop doing the same thing to the people around you. Most books treat these as separate problems with separate readers, the wounded on one shelf and the ones who wound on another. My view is that they're usually the same person on different days, and that the second habit grows out of the first.

So the book asks you to read from both positions, and some chapters will be more comfortable than others. If you came here because of what was done to you, the chapters on what you do to others may sting. If you came because you heard yourself say something to your child that you swore you'd never say, the early chapters may look like a detour. You'll need them by chapter 5.

Most of the book examines beliefs. "They had a point about me." "Being hard on myself is what keeps me going." "It worked on me." "I'm only being honest." These beliefs keep shaming alive, in your head and in your house, and each of them is partly reasonable. I'll try to treat each one fairly. The practical chapter is number 10, and it comes after the beliefs that would otherwise have undermined it.

You don't have to wait for chapter 10. If you catch a cruel sentence on its way out tonight, keep it in. Nothing later in the book depends on you saying it.

A word about a word. "Toxic shame" is a phrase from the self-help shelves, and I'll mostly avoid it because I think a plainer distinction does the job better. The distinction is between feeling bad about something you did and feeling bad about what you are. Nearly everything in this book rests on it, and chapter 2 sets it out.

A few chapters ask you to check a claim against your own memory. Please do those. You have decades of evidence about how shame has worked in your life, and it's better evidence than mine.

The sentence that stayed

You drop a glass in the kitchen. Before the pieces have stopped moving, a voice says "clumsy, as usual". There's nobody else in the room. The voice is in your head, and if you listen closely it isn't quite yours. It has someone's tone, maybe a parent's, or a teacher's, or an older brother's. You might be forty-five, and the person might have been dead for ten years, and the sentence still arrives before the glass has finished breaking.

Most people carry a few of these. They're short. "You're so lazy." "Why can't you be more like your sister?" "Nobody's going to want you if you carry on like that." "Stupid boy." Whoever said it may not remember saying it. You remember where you were standing.

Here's a second scene, as an example. It's a school morning and you're late. Your daughter reaches across the table and knocks over the milk. You hear yourself say "For God's sake, what is wrong with you?" The words come out complete, with a rhythm you didn't choose, and you recognise the rhythm. Her face closes. You know that expression from the inside.

If the first scene is familiar, you know what it's like to be shamed. If the second is familiar too, you know something harder, which is that you hand it on. You may have promised yourself you never would. Plenty of people make that promise at fifteen and break it at thirty-five, in a supermarket, in front of strangers.

You don't need me to tell you that humiliating people is wrong, or that the voice in your head is unkind. You know both, and knowing hasn't stopped either one. The usual conclusion is that you're damaged, or a bad parent, or a bad partner. That conclusion is itself a piece of shaming. It takes something you did and turns it into something you are.

That move is the subject of this book, so I'll state it now. Shaming is the move from what a person did to what a person is. "You spilled the milk" is about an event. "You're so clumsy" is about a person. The first can be dealt with using a cloth. The second can't be dealt with at all, because there's nothing to do about being a kind of person except feel bad and hide.

My argument is that shaming, of yourself and of others, is a habit. It's learned, usually early, and usually from people who'd learned it themselves. It survives for the reason most habits survive, which is that it pays something each time.

The payments are real and I won't pretend otherwise. Shaming someone gets a fast result. The child goes quiet, the colleague backs down. It also moves a bad feeling out of you and into someone else, and that brings a few seconds of relief. It can feel like having standards. Shaming yourself has payments too. It feels like conscience. It feels like the only thing standing between you and sloppiness. And if you say the worst about yourself first, nobody else can surprise you with it.

I'll try to show that each payment is smaller than it looks, and that each comes with costs you've stopped noticing. The relief is brief. The compliance is mostly hiding. The harsh voice slows you down

more than it drives you on. There's another way of holding yourself and other people to a standard, and it works better. You've seen it work. Somebody, at some point, corrected you without making you feel worthless, and you remember them too.

I can't promise the old sentences will go silent. I don't think memory works like that. What I think you can have is a clear view of what those sentences are, so they stop passing for facts, and a different sentence ready for the moment when you're about to hand one on.

Two things before we go on.

If someone in your life humiliates you as a routine, and also controls your money, your movements or who you see, or frightens you, that's more than shaming. It may be abuse, and a book isn't the right help. A domestic abuse helpline can talk it through with you in confidence, and you don't have to be sure what to call it before you ring.

If your shame comes with thoughts of harming yourself or of not being here, please talk to a doctor or a crisis line today. If you're in immediate danger, call the emergency services. Shame tells people they're a burden. That's the feeling talking, and it's wrong.

Two feelings with one name

Go back to the milk, and to the two sentences available to the adult at that table. "You spilled the milk" describes something that happened a moment ago and is already finished. "You're so clumsy" covers the past and the future, and a child can't fetch a cloth for what she is.

Psychologists who study this give the two resulting feelings different names. Guilt is the feeling that you did a bad thing. Shame is the feeling that you are a bad thing. In ordinary speech we mix them up all the time, and "I'm so ashamed of what I did" might mean either. The researcher June Tangney and her colleagues have spent decades separating them, and the separation matters because the two feelings push people in opposite directions.

Guilt is uncomfortable in a useful way. It's focused on the act, so it points at things you can do. You apologise, you fix it, you pay for the window. People who are prone to guilt tend to take responsibility and to feel for the person they hurt. That makes sense, because their attention is on the other person and the damage.

Shame is focused on the self, and that changes its whole character. Your attention swings away from the person you hurt and on to how you look and what you are. The body wants to get small. The face heats up, the eyes drop, and you'd like the floor to open. People who are prone to shame tend to hide, to deny, and quite often to get angry and blame someone else. In a review of the

research, Tangney's group found shame linked again and again to those outcomes, and guilt linked to repair. A separate analysis that pooled 108 studies found shame tied to symptoms of depression more strongly than guilt was.

This cuts against the common idea that shame is what keeps people decent. On the evidence, the feeling that makes people put things right is guilt. Shame mostly makes people protect themselves.

I should be fair to shame here, because the research isn't all one way. A flash of embarrassment when you've let someone down is normal, and it passes. There's also evidence that shame can push people towards improving themselves when they believe the failure can be repaired. A 2015 analysis of 90 samples found that split. Where repair looked possible, shame went with constructive effort. Where it didn't, shame went with withdrawal. So the trouble lies with a particular kind of shame, the kind that has no way back in it.

That gives us a working definition of shaming, the act. Shaming is a message with some or all of these features.

- It's about what the person is, and the event has dropped out of view.
- It carries contempt. The tone, the eye-roll or the sigh says the person is beneath the speaker.
- It often has an audience, or threatens one.
- It offers no way back. Nothing the person could do would end the matter.

The fourth feature is the one that research points at. "You're clumsy" can't be repaired. Neither can "you've always been selfish" or "I don't know why I bother with you". The person on the receiving end has been given pain and no job to do with it. I take that to be what people mean by toxic shame. The feeling has nowhere to go, so it stays.

A short exercise, worth two minutes. Think of a time you did something wrong and felt guilty about it, and recall what you did in the following hour. Now think of a time you were made to feel ashamed, small and exposed, and recall what you did in the hour after that.

My bet is that in the first memory you moved towards someone, to apologise or explain or make up for it. In the second you moved away. You went to your room, or went quiet, or got angry, or made a joke and changed the subject. If that's right, you already know from the inside what the studies found. You also know what your own shaming does to whoever receives it.

"If it hurts this much, it must be true"

An example. A man in his fifties gives a presentation at work, and it goes fine. Afterwards a colleague says, lightly, "bit disorganised, that". For the rest of the day he can't concentrate. By evening he's sure everyone in the room saw a fraud. He knows this is out of proportion. He also can't shake the thought that a remark couldn't hurt this much unless it had hit something real.

That thought deserves a proper look, because it holds a lot of old shame in place. The reasoning goes that false accusations bounce off and true ones sting. This one stings, so it must be true.

Start with why being judged hurts at all. The usual explanation is that humans have always lived in groups and depended on them, and a person who was thrown out didn't last long. Whatever the origin, we have a fast, physical reaction to signs that others think less of us. I'll call it the flush. It's heat in the face, a drop in the stomach and a wish to be elsewhere. There's measurement behind this. A review of 208 laboratory studies found that the tasks most reliably raising the stress hormone cortisol were those where people could be judged negatively by others, especially when they couldn't control the outcome. Hard tasks without that threat of judgment did much less.

Now look at what sets the flush off. It responds to the threat of being judged, and it has no way of checking whether the judgment is correct. It fires when a stranger sneers at your coat. It fires harder when the speaker matters to you, and hardest of all when the speaker was a parent and you were small.

A child can't weigh the source. An adult who's called stupid by a tired, frightened or drunk person can, on a good day, think "that's about them". A seven-year-old can't. The adults are the authority on everything, from what's for dinner to whether the sun will come up. When one of them says "you're lazy", the child files it with the other facts. If it's said often, it stops being something she was told and becomes something she knows. That's how another person's sentence ends up sounding like your own voice in an empty kitchen.

So the strength of the sting measures how much the speaker mattered, how young you were, and how often it was said. None of those is accuracy. The remark about the presentation hurt the man in the example because it touched a sentence laid down forty years earlier by someone else. It tells him about his history. It tells him nothing about his presentation.

That deals with the pain. It leaves the question of whether the label might be true anyway. Perhaps you really are lazy, or selfish, or too much.

Look at what a label is. It's a summary with the evidence taken out. Somebody saw a few events, such as homework not done and a room not tidied, and compressed them into one word about your character. The word then travels without the events. A label is like a bill that shows a total and no items. You can't check it, you can't dispute any line, and you can't tell what you're being charged for.

This makes a label useless even when there's something behind it. Take "lazy". A child who doesn't do homework may be tired, or frightened of getting it wrong, or unable to see the board, or bored,

or unclear about what was set. Each of those has a different remedy. "Lazy" hides all of them and offers no remedy at all. It sounds like an explanation, and it explains nothing.

This chapter's exercise needs a pen. Take the label you've carried longest and write it at the top of a page. Underneath, write the events it was built from, as a stranger standing in the room would have seen them. Use no character words. "I left my homework until Sunday night, most weeks, when I was eleven." "I cried at my uncle's funeral and couldn't stop." "I forgot to collect my brother, once."

Two things tend to happen. The list is shorter and more ordinary than the label suggested. And the items turn out to be the kind of thing that happens in most families, to most people, without anyone drawing a conclusion about their whole nature.

Sometimes the list comes out empty, and that's worth knowing too. A good deal of shaming was never about anything you did. Children get shamed for their weight, their accent, their family's money, a stammer, a disability, their skin, being gay, or being the unsporty one in a sporty family. There's no event to find because there wasn't one. You were being told that a plain fact about you was a fault. In that case there's no information to keep. The whole message was label, and all of it can go back. That's easier to write than to do, particularly when the contempt came from many people over many years, and chapter 12 has more to say about it.

There's an honest objection. Sometimes the list isn't ordinary. Sometimes you did something that hurt a person badly, and the events on the page are ugly. A label still won't help you. Guilt will,

because it's the right tool for a bad act and it has a job attached. You apologise if you can, you repair what can be repaired, and you work out what you'll do differently. "I did a harmful thing and I'm putting it right" is a hard sentence to live with. It's also far more useful than "I'm a terrible person", which asks nothing of you except suffering.

So the practice is the same either way. Keep the information and hand back the label. If there's an event in the criticism, it's yours to deal with. The verdict on your character was never evidence of anything, except perhaps the state of the person who delivered it.

"The voice keeps me in line"

You've missed a deadline. Before anyone else has noticed, the voice has started. "Typical. You had three weeks. Everyone else manages. You're a joke." You let it run, partly because you can't stop it and partly because you think you shouldn't. It seems to you that this voice is the reason you get anything done, and that if you ever went easy on yourself you'd slide into doing nothing.

This may be the most respectable belief in the book. People who'd never call their child useless will call themselves useless ten times before lunch and consider it discipline. The belief has evidence behind it, of a kind. You've passed exams, held jobs and raised children with the voice running the whole time. It was present at every success, so it gets the credit.

It was present at every failure too, so presence doesn't tell us much.

Researchers have checked. In two studies that followed people pursuing personal goals, the more self-critical participants made less progress than the others. In a set of experiments at Berkeley, people were reminded of a failure or a weakness of their own. Some were then prompted to respond to themselves with understanding. Others were prompted to shore up their self-esteem, or given no prompt. The ones steered towards understanding were more motivated to change. In one experiment they had just failed a hard test, and they spent longer studying for the next one.

That result surprises people, and the distinction from chapter 2 explains it. Self-shaming produces shame, and shame makes you want to hide. What you hide from is whatever the shame is attached to. It's the email you can't open, the bank statement in the drawer, the manuscript you haven't looked at since the rejection. You avoid the task because going near it sets the voice off, and the voice then cites the avoidance as further proof. I think a great deal of what gets called laziness is this loop. A person keeps away from a job because it has become the place where they get insulted.

The voice seems to offer a second thing, which is armour. If you've already called yourself an idiot, nobody else can ambush you with it. I understand the appeal, but add up the cost. To avoid an occasional blow from outside, you deliver a daily one from inside. You've taken over the job of the person who first shamed you, and you do it more thoroughly than they did, because you're always there.

There's a third thing, and it's the hardest to argue with from the inside. The voice can feel like justice. You did something wrong, so you ought to suffer, and calling yourself names is how the suffering gets done. Letting up would feel like getting away with it. Look at who receives the payment, though. If you snapped at your mother, an evening of calling yourself a rotten daughter gives your mother nothing. She doesn't know it's happening. What she could use is a phone call. Suffering feels like paying, and nobody gets paid. Guilt is settled by repair, and an evening of self-punishment is often what we do in place of the ten awkward minutes the repair would take.

The fear underneath all this is that the alternative is slackness. You picture someone telling themselves "never mind, you did your best" while their life falls apart. I'm not recommending that.

Think of the best teacher or boss or coach you ever had. My guess is that they had high standards and that they never made you feel like dirt. When you got something wrong they told you plainly, and the telling was about the work. You weren't afraid of them, and you worked harder for them than for anyone who shouted. High standards and contempt are separate things. You can keep the first and drop the second, and the standards do better without it.

In practice, talking to yourself that way has three parts, the same three you'd use on anyone else. You say what happened, what it cost, and what you'll do now. "I missed the deadline. The client is annoyed and I've made next week harder. I'll ring her at nine, give her a real date, and block out Thursday." There's nothing soft about that. It's more demanding than "you're a joke", which asks you to do nothing except feel bad.

Here's a quick test for any sentence you aim at yourself. Would you say it, in those words, to a colleague you respect who'd made the same mistake? If you wouldn't, the reason is that you know it wouldn't help them. It doesn't help you either.

The voice won't stop because you've read a chapter. It's had years of practice. What can change fairly soon is that you stop treating it as management. When it starts, you can notice it, recognise whose tone it has, and then ask the useful question, which is what happened and what you'll do about it.

Four things people do with shame

Shame is hard to stay in. It's one of the most unpleasant feelings there is, and people get out of it as fast as they can. The psychiatrist Donald Nathanson described four exits. Later researchers built a questionnaire around them and found that the four did show up as separate patterns. I'll give them plain names.

Hiding. You leave, or you go quiet, or you stop answering messages. You skip the reunion. You don't put your hand up again that term, or ever.

Turning on yourself. You join in with the attack. "I'm such an idiot, I always do this." It has a logic to it. If you punish yourself hard enough, perhaps others won't need to, and at least you're on the side of the people judging.

Covering it over. You change how you feel without touching the cause, with a drink, a joke, a shopping trip, three hours of extra work, or a boast. From the outside this one often doesn't look like shame at all. It can look like confidence. Relentless achievement can be this exit too. Some people cover an old sense of being worthless with a long list of things that prove otherwise, and find the list never gets long enough.

Turning on someone else. You find fault with another person, fast. The one who criticised you is an idiot. Your partner made you late. The child who embarrassed you in the shop is a brat.

Here's an example of all four from one event. Four people are each told by a manager, in front of the team, that their report was sloppy. The first says nothing for the rest of the meeting and eats lunch alone. The second spends the evening listing every mistake she's made since she joined. The third goes to the pub and is very funny about the manager. The fourth goes home and tears into his teenage son about the state of his bedroom.

Most of us have a favourite and use all four. You'll probably recognise yours quickly. If not, think of the last three times you felt the flush and what you did in the next hour.

Each exit works for a few minutes, which is why we keep using them. None of them touches the event. The report is still sloppy, if it was. None of them settles the feeling either. They postpone it, and the first three deepen it, because hiding, self-attack and numbing each give you something new to be ashamed of.

The fourth exit needs the closest look, because the rest of the book turns on it.

It works like this. Shame says the defective person in the room is you, and that's close to unbearable. If the defective person could be somebody else, the feeling would lift. So the mind goes looking, and it's fast and not fussy. Within a second or two you're angry, and anger feels much better than shame. Shame makes you small and anger makes you big. You're no longer the one in the wrong. You're the one pointing.

The research on this is consistent. In one early study, Tangney and colleagues found that people prone to shame were also more prone to anger, resentment and suspicion, and to blaming others when things went wrong. People prone to guilt weren't. Later work by the same group looked at how shame connects to aggression. People prone to shame weren't more aggressive across the board. They were more aggressive to the extent that they blamed others, which makes blaming the link between the two.

Look at who receives it. The fourth man in the example didn't tear into his manager. He tore into his son. Shame that gets turned outward tends to run downhill, towards whoever is safest to attack. That might be a child, a junior colleague, a partner who'll put up with it, or a stranger on the internet. It usually arrives in the form it was received. He was called sloppy in front of others, so his son is called a slob with the door open and his sister listening.

The son now has a flush of his own and four exits to choose from.

That's the mechanism I mean by handing it on. Most shaming is done by people who feel small in that moment and have found a way of feeling bigger. Few of them feel superior while they do it. It moves through a family or an office like a debt that nobody pays and everybody passes to someone weaker.

This is uncomfortable if you recognise yourself in it. It's also good news of a practical kind. If your shaming of others starts with your own flush, then the flush is a warning you can learn to read, and you'll get it a second or two before the sentence. Chapter 10 builds on that.

The sentence in your own mouth

Very few people think of themselves as someone who shames others. The word suggests a bully, and you're not one. You love your kids. You're decent to your staff. So I'll set out the ordinary forms, the ones decent people use, and you can see which are familiar.

- Labels. "You're so lazy." "Don't be such a baby." "You're hopeless with money."
- The question that isn't one. "What is wrong with you?" "How many times do I have to tell you?"
- Comparison. "Your brother never gave us this trouble." "Sarah's team manages to hit their numbers."
- "Always" and "never". "You never think about anyone else." These are labels dressed as observations.
- Correction in front of others. Telling someone off at the dinner table, in the meeting, in the group chat, at the school gate.
- The story told in their hearing. "You won't believe what this one did yesterday."
- The face. The eye-roll, the sigh, the look exchanged with someone else over their head.
- The archive. Bringing up a mistake from three years ago that was supposedly finished.
- Withdrawal of warmth. Going cold until they've grovelled enough.
- The joke with a target, followed by "can't you take a joke?"

- Online, the quote-post with a sneer, where the point is for others to see.

None of these needs a raised voice. Some of the most effective shaming is done quietly, by people with good manners.

There's one more form, and people rarely count it. It's what you say about yourself in front of others. A mother who stands at the mirror and calls herself fat and disgusting is shaming herself in her daughter's hearing. So is a father who calls himself an idiot every time he drops a screw. The children are watching a daily demonstration of how a person gets spoken to after a mistake, and I'd expect them to pick it up along with everything else.

If several are familiar, the next part matters more than the list. Think back to the last time you used one, and look at the few seconds before it.

Here are some examples of what people find there. Your toddler has a screaming fit in the supermarket and people are looking. What you feel, under the irritation, is exposed as a parent who can't control her child. That's a flush. "Stop it, you're embarrassing me, what's the matter with you?" comes next.

Or a member of your team makes an error, and your own boss spots it in a meeting and asks you about it. You feel incompetent in front of your manager. An hour later you're telling the team member that he's careless, with the office door open.

Or your partner mentions, at dinner with friends, that you still haven't fixed the gutter. You feel small. On the way home you tell her she's a nag, just like her mother.

In each case you were handed a dose of shame, and you passed it to the nearest person who couldn't hand it back. The toddler wasn't trying to humiliate you. She's two. The label she got had very little to do with her and a great deal to do with the people watching you.

I'm not saying this is the only source. Sometimes people shame because they're tired and it's quick. Sometimes it's the only method of correction they were ever shown, and that's the second thing to notice. The sentences are inherited. People are often startled to hear a parent's exact phrase come out of their own mouth, with the same stress on the same words. We pick up the phrases of correction in childhood the way we pick up an accent, by hearing them daily, long before we could judge them. Under pressure we speak the way we were spoken to.

This isn't a chapter about blaming your parents. They were handed their sentences too, often in harder times and with rougher delivery, and many of them softened what they got before passing it to you. Explaining where a habit came from is different from excusing it, and it's your mouth now. Knowing the origin does help with one thing. It removes the idea that your shaming expresses your real opinion of the people you love. Mostly it expresses your own flush, in borrowed words.

For the next few days, try to catch the moment before. You're looking for the flush, your own sense of being exposed, judged or made to look bad, in the seconds before you say something about what another person is. When you catch it in time, the simplest course is to say nothing about the person. Deal with the milk, the

error or the gutter, and leave the rest unsaid. Chapter 10 covers what to say instead. For now, silence about someone's character is always available, and it's enough.

"It worked on me"

This is the strongest defence of shaming, and it's usually sincere. "My dad called me useless every day of my life and it made me determined to prove him wrong. I turned out fine. Kids today are never told anything hard, and look at them."

Let's grant what's true in it. Shaming does get results, and fast. Call a child a baby for crying and she'll probably stop crying. Humiliate an employee over a late report and the next one will probably be on time. If the only measure is what happens in the next ten minutes, shaming is effective, which goes a long way towards explaining why it's so common.

The question is what else it produces, and over what time.

In one experiment, five and six year olds acted out small scenes in which they made a mistake and a teacher responded. Some heard criticism of themselves as people, along the lines of "I'm very disappointed in you". Others heard criticism of how they'd gone about it, with a prompt to think of another way. The children criticised as people felt worse, rated their work lower, and were less willing to keep going. The ones told about method came up with ways to fix the problem. The children were the same age and had made the same mistake.

A study that followed 976 families looked at harsh verbal discipline from parents when a child was thirteen, meaning shouting, swearing and insults such as "dumb" or "lazy". It predicted more behaviour problems and more depressive symptoms a year later.

The misbehaviour didn't fall. It rose, and that drew more harsh words from the parents, in a loop. A warm relationship the rest of the time didn't cancel the effect.

The pattern isn't limited to children. A study of more than six thousand Americans aged fifty and over looked at those who weren't obese at the start. The ones who reported being discriminated against because of their weight were about two and a half times more likely to have become obese four years later. A study like this can't prove that the contempt caused the weight gain. If the contempt was meant to slim anyone down, though, there's no sign here that it did.

In a study of nearly five hundred jail inmates, those inclined to guilt were less likely to reoffend in the year after release. Shame had no such clear effect, and where it led to blaming others, it predicted more reoffending.

These are single studies, each with limits, and I've put the details in the notes. But they agree with each other and with the pattern from chapter 2. Shaming produces a wish to hide, so what it teaches, reliably, is hiding. The shamed child doesn't stop making mistakes. She stops telling you about them. The shamed employee gets better at covering his tracks and quicker to point at someone else. You get good behaviour while you're in the room, plus a person who now regards you as a danger to be managed.

The lesson also reaches whoever is watching. The sister who hears her brother called a slob learns what happens to people who slip up in this house, and she learns the wording.

I think that's the largest hidden cost. People bring their problems to those who are safe to bring them to. A parent who shames will be the last to hear about the bullying, the pregnancy or the debt. A manager who shames hears about the fault in the product after the customers do.

That leaves "I turned out fine". I'd answer gently, because there's a lot packed into it. Some of it is loyalty. Saying that shaming harmed you can feel like accusing a parent who also fed you, worked double shifts for you, and loved you in the way they knew. You can hold both. They did a great deal right, and this particular method cost you something.

Then there's the word "fine". You got through. Many people do, and often it's because of other things in their lives, such as a grandmother, a teacher, or a friend's family where the air was different. It's worth asking what you learned to hide along the way, and from whom. It's worth asking whose voice comments when you drop a glass. And if being driven to prove him wrong built your career, it's fair to ask whether the proving has ever felt finished.

"It worked on me" is often true in a narrow sense, and I'm not asking you to deny it. I'm asking you to look at the full price, including the part you're still paying. Then decide whether you want the people you love to pay it too.

"I'm only being honest"

Two defences come up whenever someone is asked to stop shaming. One is honesty and the other is humour. Both protect something valuable, so both deserve care.

Take honesty first. Nobody wants to live among people who can't say a hard thing. If your colleague's report is full of errors, he needs to hear it. If your friend is drinking too much, a friend should say so. A book that told you to keep quiet about such things would be doing harm, and this one doesn't.

The test I'd apply is content. An honest statement contains information the other person can use. "There are three errors in the revenue figures on page four" is honest. So is "I've counted, and you've had a drink every night we've met this year, and I'm worried". Both are hard to hear. Both give the listener something to check and something to do.

Now compare "you're careless" and "you're turning into a drunk". They feel more honest, because they're blunter and took more nerve to say. But look at how much each one claims. "You're careless" asserts knowledge of a person's entire character on the strength of one report. You don't have that knowledge, and nobody does. Of the two statements about the report, the label is the less honest, because it goes well beyond what the speaker knows. It's an exaggeration, and it gets mistaken for candour because it's rude.

There's a further point, and it's an awkward one. When people say "I'm only being honest", the most honest sentence available is often about themselves, and it goes unsaid. "I was embarrassed in front of my boss." "I'm frightened about what your drinking will do to us." "I felt stupid when you corrected me at dinner." These are true and specific, and saying them would take real courage. The label is what we say so that we don't have to.

So shaming isn't honesty at a higher strength. You can turn honesty up as far as you like, with dates, figures and consequences, and never once say what kind of person the other is.

An example may help, since this is where people fear they'll lose their edge. A manager has an employee whose work has been poor for three months. The honest conversation is a hard one. "Four of your last six reports came back from the client with corrections. I've had to check everything you send, and that's a day a week of my time. If it continues, I'll have to start a formal process. I want to understand what's going on, and I want the next two reports to go out clean." Every sentence of that is uncomfortable, and none of it is a label. Adding "frankly, you're just not a details person" would make it less precise and no more truthful. It would also hand the employee something to argue with, and the argument would replace the conversation about the reports.

Now the joke.

Teasing is one of the pleasures of being close to people. Friends who've known each other thirty years insult each other constantly, and everyone at the table understands it as affection. Families have

running jokes that would sound savage to an outsider. I've no wish to take any of that away. A household where nobody could be teased would be an airless place.

The difficulty is that a joke is also a convenient carrier for contempt, because it comes with a built-in denial. If the target objects, they're told they can't take a joke, which is a second shaming laid on top of the first. They're now humourless as well as whatever the joke said they were.

A few questions sort one kind from the other.

- Can they do it back? Teasing between equals runs both ways. If it only runs from parent to child, from boss to junior, or from the quick-witted partner to the slower one, it isn't play.
- Is the subject a sore one? Friends tease each other about things that don't hurt. A joke about someone's weight, their stammer, their failed business or their exam results is aimed at a bruise.
- Who's the audience? A joke made to the person is different from a joke made about them to the room.
- Do you stop when asked? This is the clearest test. If they say "I don't find that funny" and you stop, it was a joke. If you start arguing that it was funny, the laugh wasn't what you were after.

A note on children and sarcasm. Small children don't reliably understand irony. In studies, five-year-olds lag well behind older children at working out what a sarcastic speaker means. "Oh, brilliant, well done" over a broken plate gives a five-year-old praise in the words and contempt in the voice, and she can't put the two

together. At best she's confused. At worst she gets the contempt and misses the joke. Either way she's learned nothing about the plate.

The face from chapter 6's list belongs here too, because it has the same built-in denial as the joke. The eye-roll and the sigh say "you're beneath me" without a word that could be quoted back. People who'd never call their partner stupid will roll their eyes at them in company. If you're checking your own habits, check your face as well as your sentences.

"Without shame there'd be no standards"

This fear sits under most of the others. If you stop shaming your children, they'll grow up spoiled. If you stop shaming your staff, they'll coast. If society stops shaming bad behaviour, there'll be more of it. And if you stop shaming yourself, which was chapter 4, you'll go to seed. Shame, in this picture, is a wall holding back chaos.

I take the fear seriously, because what it's protecting matters. Children do need limits. Work does need to be done properly. People who do harm should be told so, and should face consequences. If giving up shaming meant giving up any of that, I'd tell you to keep shaming.

It doesn't mean that, because shame was never doing the work of upholding standards. Guilt was doing it, along with consequences and the wish to stay in good standing with people we respect. All of those stay.

The criminologist John Braithwaite made this distinction for whole societies. He argued that communities express disapproval in two different ways. One treats the offender as a bad person, marks them, and pushes them out. The other condemns the act firmly while treating the offender as a decent person who did a bad thing and who is expected back. His claim was that the first kind produces more crime and the second kind less, because people who've been cast out have nothing left to lose and nobody left to

disappoint. The theory is argued over in its details. The central idea fits what the inmate study in chapter 7 found, and I think it fits families and offices as well.

So here is what holding someone to a standard looks like without shaming. It has four parts, and you've met three of them already. You say what happened, in terms a stranger would agree with. You say what it cost. You say what you expect now, including any consequence. And you make it clear there's a way back, so that once the thing is put right, it's over.

An example. A sixteen-year-old said he was at a friend's house and was in fact at a party across town. The shaming version writes itself. "You're a liar. I can't trust a word you say. I don't know who you are any more."

The other version might go like this. "You told me you were at Tom's and you were at a party in Eastfield. I rang Tom's mother, and I was frightened when you weren't there. Lying to me about where you are is serious, because I can't help you if I don't know where you are. You're not going out next weekend. After that we start again, and I want to be told the truth even when I won't like it."

Compare the two. The second is tougher. It contains an actual consequence, which the first didn't, and it names the offence more exactly. What it leaves out is the verdict on his character and the suggestion that something between you is permanently broken. He's been given a clear account of the damage, a cost, and a way back. The first version gives him a label and a reason to get better at lying.

Parents sometimes worry that the second version lets the child off emotionally, that he ought to feel bad and the label is what makes him feel it. He will feel bad. He's been told he frightened you, and he's lost a weekend. That's guilt, and it's the feeling you want him to have, because guilt is about the lie and points towards telling the truth next time. The label would add shame on top, and chapter 5 described where shame goes. He'd most likely spend the evening furious with you, which is a way of not thinking about the lie at all.

Consequences aren't shaming. A grounding, a formal warning, a failed probation, even a dismissal can be delivered with respect for the person. I'd guess you know someone who was sacked decently and someone who was sacked cruelly. The decision was the same in both cases. The difference lay in whether the person was still treated as a person on the way out.

The same reasoning applies online, where the objection is usually "but some people deserve it". Sometimes a public figure or an institution does something that ought to be criticised in public, loudly, and I'm not suggesting anyone go quiet about that. Criticise the act as hard as the facts allow. The thing to watch for is the point where the crowd moves from what the person did to what the person is, and from asking for a remedy to enjoying the pain. When a private individual is facing ten thousand strangers, no way back is on offer, and the ten-thousandth comment adds nothing to their understanding. Before joining in, ask what your post gives the person to do. If the answer is nothing, you're taking the fourth exit from chapter 5 along with a crowd, and standards have little to do with it.

Standards survive the end of shaming, and I think they're better served by it. A correction that carries no contempt can be heard, because the listener isn't busy defending their right to exist.

The decision

Here's the rule the book has been building towards.

Say what happened. Leave out what they are.

It applies to your children, your partner, your colleagues, strangers, and yourself. It asks you to give up one thing only, which is the verdict on character. Everything else stays available to you, including anger, consequences and blunt speech.

I suggest you decide now, once, that you're finished with labels. A decision made in advance holds up better than one you have to make afresh each time with your face hot. You will slip, and chapter 13 deals with that. A slip doesn't undo the decision.

Five practical parts follow.

Learn your flush. Chapter 5 argued that most shaming starts with your own shame, so the earliest warning you'll get is in your body. Find out what yours is like. For many people it's heat in the face or neck, a tight chest, a sudden awareness of being watched, or a lurch of "this makes me look bad". Over the next week, each time you notice it, just note it. "That's the flush." You're training yourself to recognise the two seconds in which the choice gets made.

Buy a few seconds. Almost nothing that prompts shaming is urgent. The milk is already spilled and the report is already wrong. Breathe out slowly, put down what you're holding, or say "give me a

minute". With a child in a public place, the most useful move is often to get yourself and the child away from the audience, because the audience is what's driving you.

Say what happened, what it cost, and what you want. Describe the event as a stranger would have seen it. Add the cost if there is one, including the cost to you. "I was embarrassed" is allowed, because it's honest and it's about you. Then say what you want to happen. "You hit your sister. She's crying and her arm is red. You're going to stay with me until you're calm, and then you're going to check she's all right."

Do it in private. An audience turns almost any correction into a shaming, however careful the words, because the flush responds to being seen. Take the colleague into a room. Wait until the friends have gone home. Take the child to the hallway. If it truly can't wait, say the minimum needed to stop the behaviour and keep the rest for later.

Leave a way back. End with what would make it right, and mean it. Once it's been made right, it's finished. That rules out the archive from chapter 6. If you bring a settled matter back out in the next argument, you've told the person that nothing is ever over with you, and they'll stop trying to repair things.

The same five parts work when the person in front of you is you. Notice the flush. Pause before the voice gets going. Say what happened, what it cost and what you'll do. Keep it between you and the facts, and don't parade your failings to others as a way of punishing yourself. When it's repaired, let it be over.

The rule needs some adjusting for different people and places.

With small children, shorten everything. "The milk spilled. Here's a cloth." They need the event and the remedy and not much else. If there was something behind it, such as reaching across when they'd been told not to, one sentence will do. "Next time, ask me to pass it." A small child who's handed a cloth learns that mistakes get cleaned up. One who's told she's clumsy learns that she is.

With teenagers, privacy matters most. Being corrected in front of friends or siblings is about the worst thing that can happen to a fifteen-year-old, and they'll defend themselves against it with everything they've got. You'll get a far better hearing in the car, where nobody's watching and nobody has to make eye contact.

At work, put the specifics in writing if they're complicated, and have the conversation face to face. Ask what happened before you say what you think happened. There's often a cause you didn't know about, and asking first saves you from correcting the wrong thing.

With a partner, watch for "always" and "never", which turn an event into a character. "You were forty minutes late and I ate alone" is an event. "You're always late, you don't care" is a label with some mind-reading added. Expect to have the first kind of conversation more than once. That's normal, and it still beats the second kind, which can be had a thousand times without anything changing.

Online, don't post on the flush. If something has made your face hot, that's the worst time to type. If you still want to say it in an hour, say it about the act.

An objection comes up at this point. You say it calmly, by the rule, and nothing changes. The towel is on the floor again. It's tempting to conclude that calm doesn't work and go back to the label. When a plain request fails, the consequence is what needs to go up, and the contempt can stay at zero. "I've asked three times about the towels. From now on, anything left on the bathroom floor goes in a bag in the garage." Remember what you're comparing with, too. The label didn't keep the towels off the floor either. You've been using it for years and you're still having the argument.

There's also a positive side to the rule, which is easy to miss. Labels do damage even when they're flattering. The experiment with five and six year olds in chapter 7 had a second half, in which children were praised. Those praised as people, with words like "you're a good girl", coped worse with a later mistake than those praised for their effort or method. By the same reasoning, a child who's been told she's clever has something to lose each time she tries a hard thing. So the rule runs in both directions. "You kept going with that even when it got difficult" gives her something to repeat. "You're so clever" gives her a status to defend.

Finally, prepare. Studies of how people act on their intentions find that they follow through more often when they've decided in advance, in the form "when X happens, I'll do Y". Pick your most common situation and write one. "When he spills something, I'll say what spilled and hand him a cloth." "When I feel my face go hot in a meeting, I'll write the point down and raise it afterwards in private." "When the voice starts after a mistake, I'll ask what happened and what I'll do now." Choose one and say it aloud once.

It sounds too simple to matter. What it does is put a sentence in your mouth in advance, so that under pressure the old one isn't the only one there.

When someone shames you now

The rule covers what comes out of you. This chapter is about what comes at you, from a boss, a parent, a partner, or a stranger with a keyboard.

Start with the first few seconds. Someone says "honestly, you're hopeless" and the flush arrives, on schedule. You can't prevent it, because it's faster than thought. What you can do is name it, silently. "This is shame." It sounds like nothing. There's brain-imaging research showing that when people chose a word for the emotion in an upsetting picture, the brain regions that react to threat responded less than when they did other things with the same picture. Those people were naming what they saw in a picture, not their own feeling after an insult, so applying it here is my extension. My own view is that the naming does something simple. It turns "I am worthless" into "I am having the feeling called shame", and the second is a smaller problem.

Then sort the message, the way you did in chapter 3. Ask whether there's an event in it. "You're hopeless" might contain "you sent the client the wrong file". If there's an event, it's yours, and you can take it cleanly. The label you can leave on the table.

This gives you a strong way to respond, which is to agree with the event and ignore the rest. "You're right, I sent the wrong file. I'll send the correct one now and ring to explain." There's no defence in that, no counter-attack, and no acceptance of "hopeless" either.

People who shame are often braced for one of the four exits from chapter 5. They expect you to crumple, grovel, laugh it off or hit back. A calm sentence about the facts gives them none of those.

If there's no event in it, or you can't tell, ask. "What did I do, exactly?" Ask it as a real question, because you do want the answer. Either you get information, which is useful, or it becomes clear to everyone, including the speaker, that there wasn't any.

When someone won't stop talking about what you are, you can say so. "I'm happy to talk about the mistake. I'm not going to discuss what kind of person I am." You may need to say it twice. After that, you can leave the room or end the call. Leaving in this way is different from the hiding exit. Hiding is driven by the belief that they're right. This is a decision not to stand there for it.

What you shouldn't do is shame back. It's tempting, and you probably know exactly where their bruises are. But it's the fourth exit, it hands the thing on, and it turns a conversation about one event into a contest over who's the worse person. Nobody wins those.

When it's a pattern and not a single remark, pick a calm moment and use the rule. "Last night at dinner you told everyone I can't be trusted with money. I felt humiliated in front of our friends. If you're worried about money, I want you to tell me at home, with the figures." Expect defensiveness. By describing their shaming you've probably set off their flush, and they've got the same four exits you have. Give it a day. Some people come back and surprise you.

Some don't. A parent in their seventies may never stop. A manager may be rewarded by their own bosses for exactly this behaviour. You can't repair another person's shame for them, and it isn't your job. What's left is managing your exposure.

With a parent, that might mean shorter visits, and leaving without a scene when it starts. "I'm going to go now. I'll ring you on Sunday." You don't have to explain each time. After a few repetitions most people work out the connection between the remarks and the empty chair. Some never do, and you've still spared yourself the afternoon.

With a manager, keep a written record of incidents in plain factual terms, with dates and the words used. Find out what your employer's process is, and talk to a union representative if you have one. In the end you may have to weigh whether the job is worth it. You're not being oversensitive if daily contempt wears you down. It wears everybody down.

If what's coming at you includes threats, control over your money or movements, or fear for your safety, go back to the note at the end of chapter 1. That needs more than a technique for replying.

Strangers online are a separate case. A sneering reply from someone you've never met sets off the same flush as a sneer across a table, because the flush can't tell the difference. Your options are better, though. You owe a stranger no conversation. Check for an event, since now and then a rude reply contains a fair correction, and take it if it's there. Then mute, block or close the app. Replying while your face is hot usually gives a crowd something to gather round.

One more thing, for afterwards. Once you've been shamed, the old voice will often pick up where the other person left off and carry on for hours. When it does, treat it like any other speaker. Ask it what happened, exactly, and deal with the event if there is one. Then tell someone you trust what was said to you, in the actual words. Chapter 12 explains why telling someone matters as much as it does.

Old shame

Some shame is decades old. It's the sentence from chapter 1, or a memory attached to it. It might be something that was said to you, or done to you, or something you did at nineteen that you've never told anyone. Most days you don't think about it, until something brushes against it.

The natural thing to do with shame like this is to hide it, and hiding feels like safety. If nobody knows, nobody can judge.

Research on secrets suggests the hiding costs more than it seems to. Michael Slepian and colleagues, across a series of studies, found that the harm of keeping a secret doesn't come mainly from the effort of concealing it in conversation. It comes from how often your mind goes back to it when you're alone. In a later set of studies covering several thousand secrets, the more shame people felt about a secret, the more their minds returned to it. Guilt didn't have that effect. So you've hidden the thing from everyone except the one person it hurts, and that person keeps going back to look at it.

There's a second cost. Something you've never said aloud has never been tested. Your only opinion on it is the one you formed at the time, often as a child, often under the influence of the person who shamed you. It's been kept out of sight for thirty years at full strength, with nothing to contradict it.

If what you're carrying is tied to abuse, assault or other trauma, read the last paragraph of this chapter before you try anything else in it.

For everything else, the main suggestion of this chapter is to tell one person.

Choose carefully. You want someone who's been trustworthy with smaller things, who doesn't gossip, and who doesn't rush to fix or to judge. It shouldn't be the person who shamed you, or someone who might use it in an argument. It could be a good friend, a sibling you're close to, a partner, a counsellor or a minister. You don't need to make a ceremony of it. "There's something I've never told anyone, and I'd like to tell you. I don't need advice."

What happens next is usually one of two things, and this is my observation, not a research finding. Often the person says some version of "me too", and you learn that the thing you thought put you outside the human race is fairly common. Otherwise they're simply not horrified. They listen, they're sorry it happened, and they go on treating you exactly as before. Either way, the belief at the centre of the shame, that anyone who knew would turn away, has been tested against a real person and has failed.

Now and then it goes badly. The person flinches, or lectures, or makes it about themselves. That tells you that you picked the wrong listener. It tells you nothing new about the thing you told them. A counsellor is a safer second try than another friend, because listening without judging is the job.

If your shame is about a plain fact of who you are, as described in chapter 3, the people most likely to say "me too" are those who share it. Finding some of them, in person or online, does the same work as telling one person, many times over.

There's a written exercise that helps as well, especially with a sentence from childhood. Put the sentence at the top of a page, and answer some plain questions underneath. Who said it? How old were they, and how old were you? What was going on in their life that year, with money, work, their marriage or their health? What had happened just before they said it? What would a stranger in the room have seen?

People are often struck by the ages. You were eight. An eight-year-old who forgets her PE kit isn't revealing her character. And the speaker was thirty-one, with three children and a husband out of work, or was a teacher with thirty-five in the class and a headteacher breathing down her neck. Read chapter 5 again with that person in mind. Quite likely they were feeling a flush of their own, and you were the nearest safe place to put it. You've carried the sentence as a fact about you. At the moment it was spoken, it was mostly information about them.

That explains it without excusing it. Nothing here requires you to forgive anyone, or confront anyone, or feel warmly towards them. Some readers will want to talk to the person. Many won't, or can't. The exercise works either way, because its purpose is to move the sentence out of the category of things you know and into the category of things someone once said.

Some readers will have a further layer, which is shame about the shame. "It was thirty years ago. Other people had it far worse. I should be over this by now. I'm just too sensitive." Look at that last sentence and you'll see it's a label, and quite possibly one you were given at the time, by the same person, when you cried. The length of time a sentence has lasted tells you how early it arrived and how often it was repeated. It doesn't say anything about weakness in you. Nobody decides how long a thing learned at seven will stay learned.

I'm not going to promise that the voice stops. For most people I don't think it does, entirely. What changes is that you recognise it. The glass breaks, the voice says "clumsy, as usual", and a second thought arrives behind it. "That's Dad's sentence." It loses its authority well before it loses its volume. Over months, many people find it comes less often, though I can't tell you it will for you.

An important limit. If your shame is tied to abuse, assault or other trauma, please don't try to work through it alone with a notebook. That kind of shame is heavy, and it's often attached to things that were never your responsibility in any way. A therapist who works with trauma is the right company for it. There are also therapies built for people with high levels of shame and self-criticism. Compassion-focused therapy, developed by Paul Gilbert, is one. An early pilot study was small, with six patients and no comparison group, and the results were encouraging. A doctor is a reasonable place to start asking.

After you've done it again

You will do it again. I'd rather say so plainly than have you discover it on a bad Tuesday and conclude the book didn't work. You've had decades of practice with the old sentences, and they're quick. One evening you'll be tired and hungry, there'll be an audience, and out it will come. "What is wrong with you?" with all the old music.

What happens in the next ten minutes matters more than the slip.

The danger is plain once you've read chapter 5. You feel a rush of shame about having shamed someone. "I'm a terrible mother. I'm just like him. I've ruined her." Now you're a person in a flush with four exits in front of you. You might hide, and avoid your daughter for the evening. You might turn on yourself for hours, which helps nobody. You might turn on her again. "Well, if you didn't wind me up." Shame about shaming produces more shaming. It's the same loop, with you in it twice.

So apply the rule to yourself, right there. "I'm a terrible mother" is a label. "I called her stupid in front of her brother" is an event. Events can be dealt with, and the way to deal with this one is repair.

Go back to the person. Soon is better, the same day if you can, though late is still worth doing. A repair has four parts.

Name what you said, in the actual words. "I called you stupid." Vague apologies, like "sorry if I was a bit sharp", leave the label standing.

Take the label back, explicitly. "That was wrong of me, and it isn't true." People skip this, and it's the part that counts. The other person needs to hear, from the mouth that said it, that the verdict is withdrawn.

Say what it was really about. "I was embarrassed because the teacher was looking at me, and I took it out on you. That's mine to sort out, not yours." This is the truthful sentence from chapter 8, the one the label was covering for.

Then, if there was a real issue, deal with it separately and by the rule. "We do still need to talk about the homework. Let's do that after tea." Keep a gap between the apology and the issue, and don't join them with "but". "I'm sorry I called you stupid, but you do need to try harder" brings the label straight back.

Don't ask for forgiveness on the spot, and don't ask for reassurance that you're a good parent or partner. That turns your repair into their job. Say it, mean it, and let them have whatever reaction they have. A teenager may shrug and leave the room. It still went in.

The same applies with adults, and the wording barely changes. "In the meeting this morning I said you were careless, in front of the team. That was wrong and unfair. I was rattled because the director had just asked me about the error. I'll correct it with the team, and I'd like to go through the figures with you separately." If the shaming was public, part of the repair should be too. Otherwise the label stays standing with everyone who heard it.

For parents in particular, I'd add a thought, and it's my interpretation. A child who's never shamed would be a fine thing, but no child has that parent. What a child can have is a parent who, having said something cruel, comes back, names it, and takes it back. That child learns that a wrong can be admitted without the person collapsing, that the way back exists, and what it looks like. She'll need that knowledge for the rest of her life. It's close to the opposite of what shaming teaches, and the only time you can teach it is after you've got something wrong.

Later, when you're calm, review the slip the way you'd review any other event. Ask what the flush was about and who was watching. Ask whether you were tired, hungry, late, or fresh from being criticised yourself. You'll often find a pattern, such as the school run, the visits to your mother, or the hour after your weekly meeting with a particular manager. Patterns can be planned for. Leave ten minutes earlier. Eat before the visit. Take a walk round the block between the meeting and your team.

Some signs mean it's time to get help beyond a book.

- The shaming is frequent and you can't interrupt it despite trying.
- It comes with rage, or with physical roughness, or people at home are afraid of you.
- The voice aimed at yourself is constant, or comes with depression, or with thoughts that others would be better off without you.
- The shame is tied to trauma or abuse.

- You're using alcohol or something else to cover the feeling most days.

Your doctor is a sensible starting point and can refer you to a therapist. If you drink heavily every day, ask the doctor before cutting down sharply, because stopping suddenly can be dangerous. If you're at risk of harming yourself or someone else, contact emergency services or a crisis line now. Asking for help is a kind of repair, which is what this chapter has been recommending all along.

The next time

Somewhere in the next few days, something will get spilled. It might be milk. It might be a colleague's error landing on your desk, or your own mistake turning up in an email, or a remark from your father on the phone. You'll feel the heat in your face, and the old sentence will present itself, ready to go.

Three small preparations will make the other sentence more likely.

Pick your replacement. If you wrote a "when X happens, I'll do Y" sentence at the end of chapter 10, you've done this already, so say it aloud once more. If you skipped it, do it now. Work out which label you use most, on others or on yourself, and write the sentence you'll say in its place, in the form of what happened and what's needed. "The figures on page four are wrong. Can you fix them by three?" That's the whole of it.

Tell one person what you're doing. It could be your partner, a friend, or an older child. "I'm trying to stop calling people names when I'm angry, including myself. If you hear me do it, you can tell me." This gives you an ally. It's also a small act of not hiding, which is practice for chapter 12.

Decide what you'll do after the first slip, before it happens. "When I hear myself say it, I'll go back within the hour, say what I said, and take it back."

That's all the preparation there is. You were handed some sentences a long time ago, by people who'd been handed them too, and for years they've passed for the truth about you. They were

only ever things that were said, mostly on someone's bad day. What you do with them now is up to you. The people around you, especially the small ones, will get whichever sentences you choose to give them.

The milk is on the table. Say what happened, and hand over the cloth.

Notes

The distinction between shame and guilt in chapter 2, and the summary of what each is linked to, draws on June Price Tangney, Jeff Stuewig and Debra Mashek, "Moral emotions and moral behavior", *Annual Review of Psychology*, 2007, volume 58, pages 345 to 372. Most of the research it reviews measures how prone people are to each feeling using questionnaires, and it's largely correlational.

The pooled analysis of shame, guilt and depression in chapter 2 is Sangmoon Kim, Ryan Thibodeau and Randall Jorgensen, "Shame, guilt, and depressive symptoms: a meta-analytic review", *Psychological Bulletin*, 2011, volume 137, pages 68 to 96. It covered 108 studies and more than 22,000 participants. It also found that some kinds of guilt, such as exaggerated responsibility for things outside your control, were tied to depression about as strongly as shame was. The guilt this book recommends is the ordinary kind, about a specific act that you can repair.

The analysis showing that shame can go with constructive effort when repair looks possible is Colin Wayne Leach and Atilla Cidam, "When is shame linked to constructive approach orientation? A meta-analysis", *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 2015, volume 109, pages 983 to 1002.

The review of stress hormone studies in chapter 3 is Sally Dickerson and Margaret Kemeny, "Acute stressors and cortisol responses: a theoretical integration and synthesis of laboratory

research", *Psychological Bulletin*, 2004, volume 130, pages 355 to 391. The account of why children absorb labels as facts is my interpretation.

In chapter 4, the goal studies are Theodore Powers, Richard Koestner and David Zuroff, "Self-criticism, goal motivation, and goal progress", *Journal of Social and Clinical Psychology*, 2007, volume 26, pages 826 to 840. The experiments on responding to failure are Juliana Breines and Serena Chen, "Self-compassion increases self-improvement motivation", *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, 2012, volume 38, pages 1133 to 1143. The goal studies were correlational. They also found that rumination and procrastination appeared to carry the effect of self-criticism on progress. That fits the loop in which shame leads to avoiding the task, though the loop itself is my interpretation.

The four exits in chapter 5 are from Donald Nathanson, "Shame and Pride: Affect, Sex, and the Birth of the Self", 1992, where he calls them withdrawal, attack self, avoidance and attack other. The plain names are mine. The questionnaire study is Jeff Elison, Randy Lennon and Steven Pulos, "Investigating the Compass of Shame: the development of the Compass of Shame Scale", *Social Behavior and Personality*, 2006, volume 34, pages 221 to 238. The shame and anger study is June Price Tangney, Patricia Wagner, Carey Fletcher and Richard Gramzow, "Shamed into anger? The relation of shame and guilt to anger and self-reported aggression", *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 1992, volume 62, pages 669 to 675. The later work is Jeffrey Stuewig, June Tangney, Caron Heigel, Laura Harty and Laura McCloskey, "Shaming, blaming, and maiming: functional links among the moral

emotions, externalization of blame, and aggression", *Journal of Research in Personality*, 2010, volume 44, pages 91 to 102. These studies show statistical links between traits measured at one time, so they can't show what came first. In the 2010 paper the link through blame showed up mainly when people reported their own aggression. The second-by-second account of how shame turns into blame is my reading of them.

In chapters 7 and 10, the experiment with young children is Melissa Kamins and Carol Dweck, "Person versus process praise and criticism: implications for contingent self-worth and coping", *Developmental Psychology*, 1999, volume 35, pages 835 to 847. There were 67 children in the criticism study and 64 in the praise study, and the children role-played the scenes. The family study is Ming-Te Wang and Sarah Kenny, "Longitudinal links between fathers' and mothers' harsh verbal discipline and adolescents' conduct problems and depressive symptoms", *Child Development*, 2014, volume 85, pages 908 to 923. The weight study is Angelina Sutin and Antonio Terracciano, "Perceived weight discrimination and obesity", *PLOS ONE*, 2013, volume 8, article e70048. Its participants were Americans aged fifty and over, from the Health and Retirement Study. It relied on people's own reports of discrimination and can't prove cause. When starting weight was taken into account, the figure fell from about two and a half times to about 1.7 times. The inmate study is June Tangney, Jeffrey Stuewig and Andres Martinez, "Two faces of shame: the roles of shame and guilt in predicting recidivism", *Psychological Science*, 2014, volume 25, pages 799 to 805. Its picture of shame is mixed. Shame that didn't lead to blaming others was linked to slightly less reoffending.

The remark in chapter 8 that small children don't reliably understand irony draws on Eva Filippova and Janet Wilde Astington, "Further development in social reasoning revealed in discourse irony understanding", *Child Development*, 2008, volume 79, pages 126 to 138, in which five-year-olds lagged behind seven and nine year olds. What a small child takes from a sarcastic tone is less settled. Morton and Trehub, "Children's understanding of emotion in speech", *Child Development*, 2001, volume 72, pages 834 to 843, found that young children judging how a speaker felt went mostly by the words when the words and the tone disagreed. So the chapter says only that the child can't put the two together.

The theory in chapter 9 is from John Braithwaite, "Crime, Shame and Reintegration", Cambridge University Press, 1989. He uses the word shaming for both kinds of disapproval and calls the respectful kind reintegrative. I've kept "shaming" for the stigmatising kind only.

The "when X happens, I'll do Y" plans in chapter 10 are known in the research as implementation intentions. See Peter Gollwitzer and Paschal Sheeran, "Implementation intentions and goal achievement: a meta-analysis of effects and processes", *Advances in Experimental Social Psychology*, 2006, volume 38, pages 69 to 119.

The brain-imaging study in chapter 11 is Matthew Lieberman and colleagues, "Putting feelings into words: affect labeling disrupts amygdala activity in response to affective stimuli", *Psychological Science*, 2007, volume 18, pages 421 to 428. Participants labelled the emotion shown in negative images. They weren't labelling feelings of their own.

In chapter 12, the studies of secrets are Michael Slepian, Jinseok Chun and Malia Mason, "The experience of secrecy", *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 2017, volume 113, pages 1 to 33, and Michael Slepian, James Kirby and Elise Kalokerinos, "Shame, guilt, and secrets on the mind", *Emotion*, 2020, volume 20, pages 323 to 328. The therapy pilot is Paul Gilbert and Sue Procter, "Compassionate mind training for people with high shame and self-criticism: overview and pilot study of a group therapy approach", *Clinical Psychology and Psychotherapy*, 2006, volume 13, pages 353 to 379. The authors describe it as an uncontrolled trial.

The rule in chapter 10, the repair steps in chapter 13, the tests for jokes and honesty in chapter 8, and the account of how shaming passes from person to person are my own reasoning, built on the research above. Test them against your own experience, as the exercises ask you to.

This book is general information and is no substitute for medical or psychological care.