



Reframe the shame.

This is a workbook for men who were handed one rule - to “never look weak.” In it, you’ll learn how to tell shame apart from guilt, and to spot the ways to put right what actually needs putting right.

It’s important you know that shame is a reflex - as natural as flinching is when your body senses danger. Use this workbook to learn how to read it, and to answer it with an evidence-based system that’s built for growth, instead of the old rule you took on to survive - which was for surviving, not for growing.

One rule runs the whole show.

Chances are you want the same things most men want. To be a solid partner, a dad who's actually present, the mate people know they can lean on. And somewhere along the way, you were handed one rule for getting all of it - *don't be seen as weak*.

When Brené Brown spent years asking people what shame feels like from the inside, the answers from men came back the same every time. Never look weak. That's the whole rule. So when something knocks you - a mistake at work, a row you can't take back - you don't just feel bad about it. You feel found out.

It helps to know that the hot, sinking flush is biology, not character. Silvan Tomkins, who mapped the feelings we're born with, showed that people are wired to chase two things - interest in what we're doing, and joy in the people around us. Shame is the circuit-breaker that trips when either gets cut off mid-flow. It's a spotlight, not a verdict.

The trouble is what the rule makes you do with it. Because feeling it counts as weakness, down it goes - numbed, laughed off, or fired at whoever's closest.

But pushed down isn't the same as gone. It's still in there, running the temper and the third pint. And you never get to read what it was actually trying to tell you.

I work with men on exactly this, and I've stood in it myself. I'm not interested in getting you to perform or confess, and you don't need fixing. What works is plainer than that. Shame can't survive being looked at with a bit of empathy - and that includes your own.

The 3-Step Mettle Method

Trace it. Find where the verdict was first handed down, and by whom. **Test it.** Put the voice under oath and cross-examine the evidence. **Repair it.** Turn shame into workable guilt and put right what can be put right.

Left alone, shame will run the same loop for decades. Same argument, same silence. Worked with, it turns into information you can actually act on. And that difference isn't willpower. It's having a method to work to.

Guilt and shame are not the same thing.

Guilt says *I did something bad*. Shame says *I am bad*. From the inside the two can feel identical - but they're not, and the difference decides what you do next.

Guilt points at a behaviour. It's specific, and it's workable. You did a particular thing, it landed badly, and there's something you can do about it. Own it, put it right, do it differently next time. Guilt is uncomfortable, but it's the kind of discomfort that drives repair, empathy and responsibility. It's your conscience doing its job.

Shame doesn't point at the behaviour. It points at you. It takes one thing you did and reads it as proof of what you fundamentally are. And there's nothing to fix, because on shame's account the problem isn't the act - it's the man. So instead of repairing anything, you shrink, go quiet, hide, or come out swinging.

That's why shame rarely travels alone. The more shame-prone a man is, the more it tends to arrive with anger, blame, low mood, anxiety, and whatever he reaches for to numb it - the drink, the overwork, the risk. Guilt moves you toward the problem. Shame moves you away from it, and usually toward something worse.

Men learn shame in particular ways, and most of it is old. A father who met any sign of softness with contempt. A school where showing weakness got you picked off. A relationship where you finally said something real and it got used against you later. The lesson, learned before you had words for it, was that certain parts of you aren't safe to show. The voice that grew out of that lesson is fast and unkind, and it still sounds like the truth.

The distinction to hold onto

Guilt is about what you *did*. Shame is about who you *are*. One you can put right. The other tells you there's nothing to put right, because you are the problem. Everything in this workbook is about moving from the second back to the first.

The four escape routes.

Nobody sits still in shame - it's too hot. The moment it lands you move, usually in one of four directions Donald Nathanson mapped as the Compass of Shame. And notice that none of the four ever looks at what the shame is actually about. They're exits, not answers.

Withdrawal - go quiet and disappear

Pull back, isolate, hide. Take yourself out of the situation so nobody sees the part you can't stand.

In men, often - cancelling plans, leaving messages on read, going silent, disappearing into work, the phone or the shed, "I'm fine."

Attack Self - agree with the worst verdict

Turn it inward. Get your punishment in first by running yourself down before anyone else can.

In men, often - "I'm pathetic," "typical me," the running commentary that sides with whoever thinks least of you.

Avoidance - numb it and stay busy

Distract, dampen, or drown it out so the feeling never quite catches up with you.

In men, often - drink, overwork, porn, scrolling, gambling, risk, bravado, joking it off, filling every hour.

Attack Other - push it outward

Get rid of the heat by aiming it at someone else. Blame, contempt and anger all move the feeling off you.

In men, often - snapping at the people closest to you, blame, sarcasm, contempt, "what's your problem?"

These four exits weren't stupid. For a lot of men they were the smartest move available to a boy in a house where feelings got punished or ignored. The problem isn't that you learned them. It's that they're still running long after the danger has passed, usually wearing a positive spin. *I'm just logical. I stay calm under pressure. I don't do drama.* Worth asking which of those is a strength, and which is a survival strategy in a better suit.

Which route is your usual exit, and what was the shame underneath actually about?

Write here...

Where it came from, and why that matters.

Shame isn't built in isolation. It forms in relationships - usually early ones, where you learned whether you were fundamentally acceptable or fundamentally not enough. It's a two-person injury long before it's ever a one-man belief.

That matters, because it means shame isn't fully resolved in isolation either. The version of you that learned to feel ashamed needed someone to show up differently, and the version carrying it now usually needs the same thing - a relationship that contradicts the original lesson.

That might be therapy. It might be a trusted mate, a partner, or a room like Andy's Man Club where men say the real thing and nothing bad happens. What it takes is safety. Somewhere you can bring the parts that feel unacceptable and find that they're met, not used.

This isn't about finding people who tell you everything you do is fine. It's about finding the ones who can hold an accurate view of you - mistakes, limits and all - without letting that become the whole story of who you are.

The relational test

Think of one person you've never felt judged in front of for being less than fully capable. If someone comes to mind, that relationship is worth protecting. If nobody does, that's worth noticing too - not as proof you're unlovable, but as useful information about what's missing and worth building.

Separate the person from the behaviour.

Restorative justice works from one line. *The problem is the problem - the person is not the problem.* You can hold someone fully to account for what they did without writing off who they are. The behaviour gets named, owned and repaired, and the person stays in the room.

Shame refuses that split. It collapses the act and the man into one verdict, and then there's nothing left to do but hide. The reframe is to prise them apart again - high expectations of your own behaviour, held alongside a basic respect for yourself as a man who can do better. Condemnation on its own just deepens the shame, and a man deep in shame repairs nothing.

That's the move from shame to workable guilt. From *I am the problem*, which turns you in on yourself, to *I did X, and I can put it right*, which turns you outward, toward the person you affected. One keeps you circling your own worth. The other actually gets something mended.

WORKED EXAMPLE

THE SITUATION

Lost my temper with my lad over nothing much. Saw his face go, and he went quiet.

THE VERDICT (SHAME)

"I'm a terrible father. He'd be better off without me."

STEP 1 - TRACE IT

That's my dad's voice, not mine. Losing your rag got you written off in our house. The verdict is his, and he was no reliable judge.

STEP 2 - TEST IT

Is that the behaviour or the whole man? One bad moment, not the record. I show up, I graft, I'm there. I'd never let a mate write himself off over one lost temper.

STEP 3 - REPAIR IT

I did something I'm not proud of - I snapped when he didn't deserve it. That's on me, and I can put it right. I'll apologise properly and mean it. A bad moment isn't a verdict on the whole man.

Trace it, then get it on the stand.

Date _____

This is the same shape as the worked example, left blank for your own. Take a real moment shame showed up - recent is easier - and work it through in writing. Step 1 finds where the verdict came from. Step 2 puts the voice under oath.

01 Step 1 - Trace it. Understand it, not excuse it

When a shame response fires, ask where you first learned this and who taught you it was unacceptable. Once you can see where it came from, it stops reading as a universal truth. And the person who handed the verdict down was often no reliable judge.

1 What shame response have you noticed recently, and where did you first learn it? Who gave you that verdict, and how reliable a judge were they?

Write here...

02 Step 2 - Test it. Name the voice, not yourself

When the shame voice arrives - you're pathetic, you failed again - treat it as an object, not a narrator. Give it a name. The critic. The old recording. Not me, right now. You're not the voice. You're the one who can hear it, and that gap is the room you get to work in.

2 What do you want to call this voice? Be specific.

Write here...

Cross-examine it, then repair.

Finish the cross-examination, then close it out with repair - the step that turns shame into something you can actually mend.

03 Step 2 - Test it. Write the verdict, then cross-examine it

Write what the voice says as a flat statement - 'I am fundamentally inadequate' - then treat it like a witness under oath. What's the actual evidence? Has it ever not been true? You're not forcing a positive spin. You're testing whether the verdict holds up.

1 Write the verdict the shame voice delivers -

Write here...

2 The evidence for it - and, honestly, the evidence against it -

Write here...

3 What would you say to a close mate who believed this about himself?

Write here...

04 Step 3 - Repair it. From your worth to their repair

Shame keeps you circling yourself. Guilt points you outward. Write what you'd say to a man you respect in this spot, read it back to yourself, then name the one thing that would put right whatever got affected.

4 What would you say to a man you respect here? Then rewrite it to yourself, swapping 'he' for 'I'.

Write here...

5 If someone was affected, the one specific thing you can do to put it right - and when -

Write here...

This is the beginning, not the work.

Reading this is useful. It's not the same as doing it. The three steps need repeating before they stick, and the relational piece in Part Three needs actual people – finding them, or repairing the relationships that matter.

Two roads from here. Keep the rule, and the loop keeps running – and it compounds. More snapping, more distance. Work the method, and the voice loses a bit of authority every time it goes under oath. You stop being the accused in your own head and start being the author of your own story.

If something in here sounded familiar, take that seriously. Most men carry shame quietly for years. Working through this at all means you're already doing something different.

If you want to talk it through before committing to anything, the free 15-minute call at Mettle is a straightforward conversation. No script. No assessment. Just an honest look at what's going on and what might actually help.

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