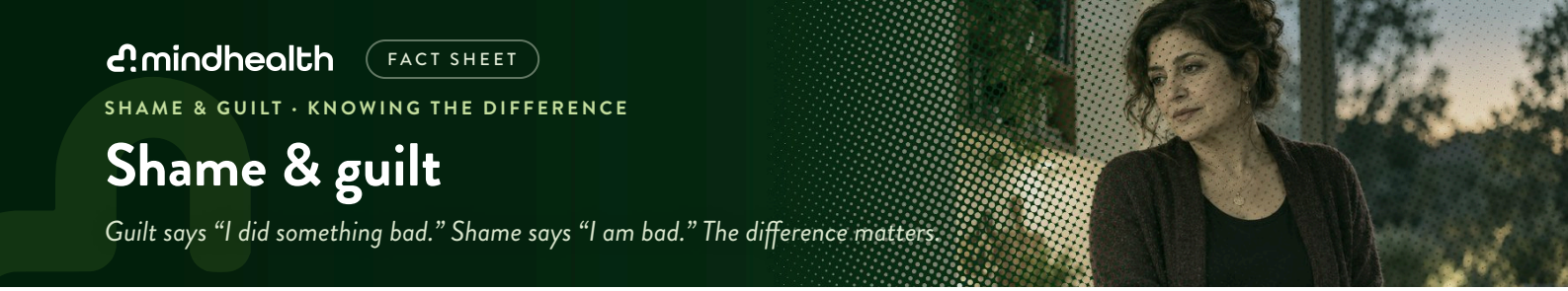
mindhealth FACT SHEET

SHAME & GUILT · KNOWING THE DIFFERENCE

Shame & guilt

Guilt says "I did something bad." Shame says "I am bad." The difference matters.



The feeling
Painful, and very human

The hiding
Wanting to disappear

The way back
Self-compassion and repair

01 Two very different feelings

Guilt and shame feel similar but pull in opposite directions. Guilt is about behaviour ("I did something bad"), and it can be useful, nudging us to repair, apologise and do better. Shame is about the self ("I am bad"), and it rarely helps: it makes us want to hide, defend or shrink, and it feeds anxiety, low mood and secrecy.

02 Why shame keeps us stuck

Because shame attacks who we are rather than what we did, there's nothing to fix (only ourselves to condemn), so it loops rather than resolves. It also thrives in silence. Naming it, sharing it with someone safe, and meeting it with self-compassion drains its power. Guilt you can act on; shame you soften.

03 What genuinely helps

- Separating "I did" (guilt) from "I am" (shame)
- Making repair where guilt is pointing
- Speaking shame aloud to someone safe
- Self-compassion: talking to yourself as a friend
- Therapy when shame runs old and deep

A PRACTICAL STORY

From "I am bad" to "I did something I can repair"



THE DIFFERENCE

Guilt vs shame

GUILT: "I DID SOMETHING BAD"
leads to: repair, apologise, learn

SHAME: "I AM BAD"
leads to: hide, withdraw, defend

Guilt can guide us; shame just isolates.

Guilt points at behaviour and can guide repair; shame attacks the self and just isolates.

PRACTICAL TOOLKIT

Soften the shame

1. Name it: guilt, or shame?
2. If guilt: make it right
3. If shame: say it aloud, kindly

You are not the worst thing you've done.

WHEN TO SEEK HELP

If shame is weighing on your mood, relationships or sense of self, a psychologist can help. Ask your GP about a Mental Health Treatment Plan for Medicare rebates.

DID YOU KNOW?

In 1971 psychologist Helen Block Lewis described the difference this way: guilt is about something you did; shame is about who you are.

Lewis, Shame and Guilt in Neurosis, 1971

THE KEY TAKEAWAY

Guilt can teach you something. Shame usually just isolates you, and it's the one to answer with kindness.

Need support right now? Lifeline **13 11 14** · Emergency **000** — available 24/7. More options: **mindhealth.com.au/urgent-help**

TALK TO US WHEN YOU'RE READY

Parramatta and online, Australia-wide · **Book at mindhealth.com.au**

1300 084 200

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