



PAPERFLOWER  
PSYCHIATRY



## Showing Up for a Friend in a Shame Spiral



A supportive guide for anyone who wants to show up for a friend caught in a shame spiral — especially when it's hard to know what to say or do.

### You've Noticed It Happen

You've seen it before. Maybe it started with something small, like a missed email. Or maybe it came from something bigger, like a lingering thought that they've failed again or that they're not good enough. Now they're quiet, withdrawn, or spiraling in self-blame.

Whatever triggered it, what's happening isn't failure. It's a nervous system overwhelmed, asking for safety. Your care can help interrupt that spiral more than you might realize.



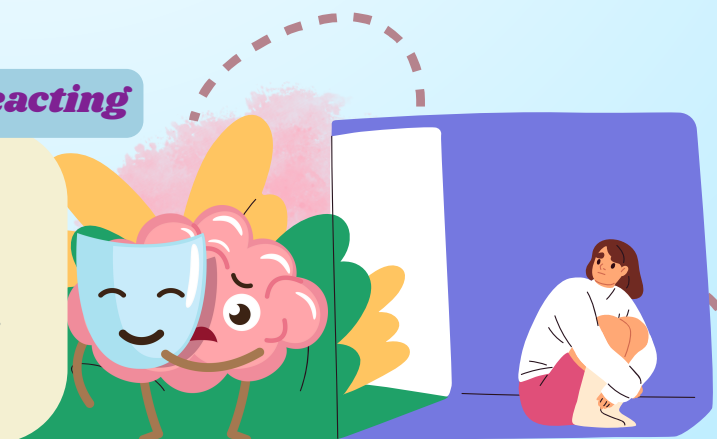
### What's Really Going On?

Their brain isn't broken. It's likely wired differently (ex. 'too' sensitive, smart, responsive) but shaped by systems that don't always understand or support it.

Shame tends to show up when their nervous system is overwhelmed, unprotected, or carrying old wounds.

### Rejection Sensitivity Isn't Overreacting

If they grew up being corrected or misunderstood, their brain may be on high alert for even minor signs of rejection. What looks like 'taking things too personally' might actually be a learned pattern of protection.





### ***Executive Function Isn't About Character***

If following through is hard for them, it's not laziness. Their brain might struggle with time, memory, or shifting attention. It doesn't mean they don't care — it often means the systems they're expected to operate in aren't working for how they process the world.

### ***Perfectionism Might Be a Survival Tool***

They may have learned that perfection was the safest path to acceptance. So they keep pushing, performing, or trying not to 'mess up.' That kind of pressure isn't sustainable — and it doesn't mean they're okay.



### ***Their Emotions Aren't "Too Much"***

If your friend feels things deeply, it's not a flaw. Some nervous systems experience emotion quickly and fully. It's not something they need to 'tone down' — it's part of their wiring.

## ***What You Can Offer as a Friend***

These aren't solutions. Just gentle ways to show up when they're spiraling or stuck. Even one of these might shift the moment for them.

### ***Reflect Back Reality***

When they start saying things like 'I'm a mess' or 'I ruined everything,' try reflecting something grounded: 'You're not a mess. You're having a hard moment.'



### ***Add Humor or Playfulness***

Ask if it helps to give their spiral a name. ('Captain Chaos,' 'The Guilt Gremlin,' 'Perfectionist Pete.') That way, when it shows up again, you both have a way to notice it together without judgment.



### ***Invite Expression***

If they're overwhelmed, suggest writing it out, speaking into a voice note, or even texting you a vent. Expression can help the nervous system release tension — and it reminds them they're not alone.



### ***Gently Challenge the Pressure to Be Perfect***

Remind them that 'good enough' is actually pretty powerful. That finishing something — or even just existing — is enough. You might say: 'You're allowed to rest. Your worth isn't tied to productivity.'



### ***Support Creative Outlets***

Encourage them to draw, write, dance, meme, or express how they're feeling — just for them. Not for proof. Not for performance. Just for processing.



### ***What Else is True?***

Let your friend know:

You are not too much.  
Your feelings make sense.  
Your needs are valid.  
You are not broken.  
You are not alone.



This world can be tough for people who feel and think deeply — but that doesn't make them any less worthy of love and understanding.

### ***A Thoughtful Gesture***

If they're open to it, leave them a note:

'That was hard. I'm proud of you for getting through it.'  
Stick it somewhere they'll see.  
Gentle reminders from someone who cares can interrupt shame's grip



### ***You Don't Need to "Fix" Anything***

Sometimes the most powerful thing you can do is stay, listen, and believe them. Reassurance doesn't have to be fancy. Being present is enough.



Thank you for being a wonderful friend.  
The world needs more people like you!

