



Seven steps to take one thing you regret from 'I can't forgive myself' to owning it, repairing what you can, and letting yourself move on. If you're blaming yourself for someone else's controlling or violent behaviour towards you, that isn't yours to forgive: talk to a domestic abuse service instead (UK 0808 2000 247, US 1-800-799-7233).

01 What happened?

Write it as the facts, the way a fair witness would describe it. Leave the verdict about yourself out of this box. It gets its own line below.

What happened, in plain facts (who, what, when):

The verdict I've been giving myself about it (the exact words):

How heavily is this weighing on me right now?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
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Barely

Very heavily

02 My part, and what wasn't mine

Taking responsibility means owning your part fully. It doesn't mean owning everyone else's, or blaming yourself for what you couldn't have known at the time. Sort each piece into the right column.

What was mine to own

What I did or didn't do

What wasn't mine

Other people's choices, circumstances, things I couldn't know

What did I know at the time, compared with what I know now?

03 What am I feeling: guilt or shame?

Guilt says 'I did a bad thing'. Shame says 'I am bad'. Guilt points at something you can put right. Shame points at your whole self, and tends to make you want to hide. Notice which one is talking.

Guilt

What I feel bad about doing

Shame

What I've been telling myself I am

Rewrite one shame line as a guilt line, about the action, not about who I am:

Who was affected, and what might it have been like for them?

04 Making amends, if it's possible and safe

Repair is often what lets guilt settle. It isn't always possible, and it's never your job to force contact on someone who doesn't want it. If what you did was abusive or controlling towards a partner or family member, don't contact them to apologise. Talk to a service that helps people change instead (in the UK, the Respect Phoneline on 0808 8024040). Tick what fits, then choose one step.

- ☐ Apologise directly, without excuses or asking them to make me feel better.
- ☐ Put right a practical cost (pay back, replace, fix, redo).
- ☐ Tell the truth about something I hid or got wrong.
- ☐ Change the behaviour so it doesn't happen again.
- ☐ Leave them alone, because that's what they've asked for or what's kindest.
- ☐ Do something good in the spirit of repair, if I can't make amends to them directly.
- ☐ Nothing is needed: this mostly hurt me, and the repair is how I treat myself now.

One step I'll take, and roughly when:

05 What I've learned, and what I'll do differently

Remorse earns its keep when it changes what you do next.
Keep this practical.

What this taught me about myself, or about what matters to me:

Next time I'm in a similar situation, I'll:

06 A letter of forgiveness to myself

Write to yourself the way a fair, kind friend would if they knew everything: what you did, why, how sorry you are and what you've done since. Name the mistake honestly, then let yourself put it down.

Start with 'Dear [your name],' and include: what happened, that I'm sorry, what I've done or will do to repair it, and that I'm allowed to move on:

07 A kinder phrase for when it comes back

It probably will come back, especially at 3am or when something reminds you. Have a line ready that's honest and kind, so you don't start the whole trial again.

When it comes back, I'll say to myself (e.g. 'I've owned this and I'm putting it right. I don't need to punish myself again.')

How heavily is this weighing on me now?



When you're done, a moment to reflect

- What would I say to a friend who had done exactly what I did, and was this sorry about it?
- What am I afraid would happen if I forgave myself?
- Is there anything I'm still avoiding owning, or anything I'm owning that was never mine?
- What value did I break, and how can I live by it from here?
- What would it look like to carry this as a lesson rather than a sentence?

If things feel heavier than a worksheet can hold

These are self-reflection tools, not therapy. If you're struggling, especially if you have any thoughts of harming yourself, please reach out to someone now. In the US, call or text **988**. In the UK & Ireland, call **116 123** (Samaritans). Elsewhere, find a free helpline at findahelpline.com. If you're in immediate danger, call your local emergency number.