



LIZ FROST

Are you suffering from a **vulnerability hangover?**

Shared too much and now you feel exposed? You're not alone. Read on for how to deal with it...

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Picture the scene. You're on a night out with a newish friend; the wine and conversation is flowing like a river and you're feeling a real bond developing between you. As tales come tripping from her tongue, you follow suit, regaling her with your own stories; only, the next morning you wake up with a heavy sense of dread and regret in the pit your stomach. This is what's known as the vulnerability hangover and, to a certain degree, it happens to us all. "It usually manifests as feelings of fear, shame, anxiety and regret," explains counsellor Hannah Beckett-Pratt (bacp.co.uk). "And the term 'hangover' is quite an accurate description because it can feel similar to waking up after a few too many glasses of wine and wondering whether we have shamed ourselves by doing or saying something when our inhibitions were lowered."

Like a regular hangover, the vulnerability hangover often happens after a tippie or two. Ever shared your life story with a colleague at the office Christmas party? But it can also happen when your emotions are running high, too. For example, declaring your love for a new partner, only to feel them withdraw in panic at the short timescale of your confession.

So, why is this happening? In the cold light of day, the ego brain starts to question the appropriateness of our sharing, explains

therapist and founder of Zephorium (zephorium.com) Sarah Cox. "Did I say too much? Can I trust them with my feelings? Maybe they won't respect me anymore." But here's the thing: We are meant to be sharing our stories! If we think back to our ancestors, a nightly experience sitting around the fire and sharing tales old and new about our life situations was a necessity and part of community life. "The experiences that we had singularly or collectively needed to be heard and validated in order to anchor our experience in our own reality. After all, who are we if no-one sees us or witnesses our life?" Sarah adds. So, how can we get past our vulnerability hangover and embrace reasonable sharing with others?

The first step is to understand why, in hindsight, we wish we could stuff our confessions back in and lock them away. Part of that comes down to the way in which our sharing is received.

"Sometimes, others do not know how to respond when we share something meaningful or revealing," says Hannah. "When we are feeling vulnerable, anything aside from an immediate empathic and warm response can feel like rejection and this hurts a lot when we have left ourselves so open."

Our own past experiences can also come into play. "Feeling as though we are 'too much' usually hints at a longer-term



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relationship with receiving criticism, shame or rejection when we have been open with others," Hannah adds. "Depending on how other important figures in our lives (particularly in childhood, and our parents and teachers) have responded to our vulnerability, we come to expect the same response in others. So, we might reveal deep information about ourselves that leaves us feeling vulnerable, but then immediately resort to a fear of rejection that is based on how these situations have played out in the past." This sense of expectation can mean we don't truly hear or absorb the reality of the present-day situation, but instead look out for any possible sign that our past experience of

rejection is being repeated.

Sarah urges us to remember that our brain is not necessarily always our friend and it's important to acknowledge and accept this. "Our survival ego brain questions everything we say, do and think, and given the opportunity, picks us apart whilst pointing out our defects," she says. "There isn't a single person on the planet who doesn't have these thoughts. The difference is how much we react to them or dismiss them. We assume that these negative feelings of shame must be who we are." Read on for some tips for how to stop the shame cycle and feel less regret.





STOP THE SHAME CYCLE

So, you've overshared and are feeling super vulnerable... what can you do about it? Hannah Beckett-Pratt shares her tips

1. Directly ask the other person how they've received your disclosure. If you're feeling worried about the other person's response, the best way to allay this fear is to reality-check it. Tell them that you recognise you shared a lot and are worried it was too much for them, then ask them if that is true. The irony here is that it makes you vulnerable again, so if it feels too much give it some time until your confidence is back.

2. Keep yourself safe. If you're going to meet a friend and you are going through something that makes you feel vulnerable, then consider ahead of time what you feel safe disclosing and what you'd prefer to keep to yourself. While being vulnerable can lead to intimacy and support, it can also leave us feeling raw and triggered, so it's important to reflect on where our own boundaries are and honour those in our interactions with others.

3. Give yourself permission to be all of who you are. To be human is to be imperfect. None of us get it right all the time and we don't have to! If you feel you've said too much, then recognise that it's ok to show these imperfect parts of yourself – it is part of who you are, after all.

4. Go easy on yourself. When fear and shame strike, so does self-criticism. Unfortunately, this puts us in a spiral which increases our anxiety. Give yourself some space and speak to yourself with compassion. You wouldn't reprimand a child or friend for being vulnerable, so offer yourself the same comfort and reassurance that you would them.

5. Prioritise self-care. Spend some time doing the things that make you feel like the best version of yourself. Vulnerability can make us feel exposed, but good self-care can help us feel restored, whole and confident again.

6. Ask for what you need. We share our vulnerability with others for different reasons. Expecting the other person to know what we need from them is not fair and reduces your chances of receiving empathy. If you're hoping the other person will help you to problem-solve and suggest solutions, let them know so they can do so. If you'd prefer them to listen or share their experiences, make this known.