CONNECT

It's not just you. *Shame and rejection sensitivity.*

Where it came from, and what loosens it.

> Guilt says *I did something wrong.* Shame says *something about me is wrong.* It is deeply personal, but it is not individually created. **Shame happens between us,** in the space between your aliveness and someone's response to it. Rejection sensitivity grows in the same soil.

HOW IT GETS BUILT

SOMETHING ALIVE

You talked too long about something you loved. You moved because moving helped you listen. You asked another question. You needed reassurance.

AN INTERRUPTION

Eyes glazed over. "Sit still." A sigh. "It's not a big deal." "Needy." The shame came afterward, not before.

THEN YOU WATCH YOURSELF

Was I talking too much? Am I annoying? Should I apologize? Masking becomes surveillance, and the person being watched is you.

THE BODY LEARNS TOO

- Heat in the face, the drop in the stomach, the urge to disappear
- The apology before you've decided whether you did anything wrong
- The nervous system recognizes "danger" before the mind catches up
- Some of what we call internal was external first. The rules were never applied equally

WHAT SAFE RELATIONSHIPS ACTUALLY OFFER

- Not *you'll never annoy me* but *my frustration doesn't make you intolerable*
- Not *you'll always get it right* but *getting it wrong doesn't cost you your humanity*
- Not endless reassurance. They make uncertainty survivable
- Misunderstanding, repair, and you are still here

Not "what is wrong with me?" but "what happened here?"

- What happened when I needed something, got excited, misunderstood, was different?
- Who taught me what those moments meant? Whose standards were they?
- What did my body learn it had to do to stay safe or loved? Does it still need to run everything?
- People aren't broken. Sometimes they're tangled.

Leah Hunter, MAMFT · Educational, not a substitute for care from a mental health professional. In crisis? US: call or text 988.