

# The Relationship Journal (Part 2): Blame

## Why Focus on Blame?

When conflict arises, blame often feels automatic. Our minds quickly search for who is at fault and why the other person should be different. While this reaction is understandable, holding onto blame can quietly undermine the very relationship we hope to improve.

Working on a relationship requires a willingness to examine blame from two directions:

- **Internally:** whether you are willing to loosen your grip on blame in your own thoughts and feelings.
- **Externally:** how blame shows up in words, tone, body language, or actions and how this impacts the other person.

When blame remains active internally, it often fuels resentment, distance, and emotional withdrawal. When blame shows up externally, it can provoke defensiveness, counterattacks, or shutdown. Over time, these patterns tend to intensify conflict rather than resolve it.

This section invites an honest question: If this relationship truly improved, blame would no longer be necessary. Is that what you actually want?

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## Deciding Whether You Want to Give Up Blame

Not everyone is ready or willing to let go of blame. Some people know immediately that they are not. Blame may feel protective, energizing, or justified. Others may believe they want to give it up, but feel conflicted once they look more closely. Still others may feel unsure.

Before trying to change anything, it is important to slow down and make a conscious decision. Letting go of blame is not a moral requirement or a sign of emotional maturity. It is a personal choice.

To make this decision thoughtfully, it helps to understand both the *costs* and the *benefits* of blaming. Only then can you decide whether change truly makes sense for you.

## Cost Benefit Analysis of Blame

A cost–benefit analysis (CBA) is a structured way to explore what you gain and what you lose by continuing to blame. Many people assume blame is entirely harmful, but this assumption can create resistance and confusion. If blame truly had no benefits, it would be easy to let go of.

Instead of rushing past this step, take time to explore it with curiosity and honesty.

## Exploring the Advantages of Blame

People often find this part surprisingly difficult. The following questions may help uncover potential benefits:

1. How does blaming help me? Does it protect me, motivate me, or help me feel safe?
2. What positive qualities does blaming seem to express about me? (For example, values, strength, fairness, or self-respect.)
3. If I did not blame this person at all, what would I lose?
4. From an evolutionary perspective, could blame serve a survival or protective function?
5. From a spiritual or moral perspective, could blame serve a purpose?

Possible advantages might include:

- It communicates that I will not tolerate being mistreated
- It helps me feel strong, righteous, or morally clear
- It creates hope that the other person will change
- It protects me from shame or self-doubt
- It signals to others that I am not at fault

There are no right or wrong answers. The goal is honesty, not self-judgment.

## Exploring the Disadvantages of Blame

Many people find this part easier. Disadvantages may include emotional distance, recurring conflict, exhaustion, hopelessness, or damage to trust and intimacy. Write down whatever feels true for you, even if it feels obvious.

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## How You Can Use This Technique (Part 2)

**Step 1.** Write down the name of the person you identified in Part 1 - the relationship you are considering working on.

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**Step 2.** List all the advantages of continuing to blame this person. Take your time. If the list feels short at first, revisit the questions above.

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**Step 3.** List all the disadvantages of continuing to blame this person.

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**Step 4.** Imagine two internal voices debating:

- One voice argues for continuing to blame, using your list of advantages.
- The other voice argues for letting go of blame, using your list of disadvantages.

Now divide 100 points between these two voices based on how convincing each one feels to you. For example, 30 points for advantages and 70 for disadvantages, or 60 and 40.

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**Step 5.** Look at how you divided the points.

- If the advantages of blaming outweigh the disadvantages, it makes sense to **pause and not move forward with change** right now. Letting go of blame would mean losing benefits that currently feel important or protective, and it may not be the right time to give those up.
- If the disadvantages of blaming outweigh the advantages, you may be ready to **move toward the next steps of change**, since holding onto blame appears to be costing more than it gives.
- If your split falls roughly between 40–60 in either direction, you may be ambivalent. This suggests uncertainty, and it may be wise not to push yourself to change yet.

**Step 6.** If you want to change despite strong advantages to blame, exploring more with the technique Externalization of Resistance more deeply may bring additional clarity.

## What Comes Next

This second part of the Relationship Journal focuses on blame. Another way to view this step is to imagine the relationship fully improved. In that version of the relationship, blame no longer plays a central role.

This section helps you decide whether that outcome genuinely aligns with what you want.

The next stage of the Relationship Journal explores the effort required to improve a relationship and whether you are willing to do that work.

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## Important Things to Keep in Mind

- Letting go of blame does **not** mean tolerating harmful or abusive behavior.
  - You may choose to give up blame in one relationship and not in another.
  - It is valid and acceptable to decide not to give up blame.
  - If you decide not to proceed, you can revisit earlier steps and consider other paths forward.
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## Final Note

This step is not about forcing forgiveness, minimizing pain, or assigning fault differently. It is about clarity, honesty, and choice.

By understanding what blame gives you and what it costs, you place yourself back in the position of deciding how you want to show up in your relationships.