

Tool 19: Shame Interrupter Protocol

Teen Version (Ages 13–17) — Teacher Instructions Only

Audience: This tool is for teachers and facilitators. It is not shown to students and is not used as a worksheet.

What this tool does

This protocol trains you, the teacher, to respond to student confusion without triggering shame. During adolescence, students often interpret confusion as failure or incompetence. If unaddressed, this leads to silence, disengagement, or performative agreement.

When to use this tool

Use this protocol when you observe: • reluctance to ask questions • fear of looking wrong in front of peers • rushing through work to avoid exposure • visible frustration or shutdown

What you do as the teacher

Before correcting or explaining, pause the moment. Your role is to interrupt the internal judgment that often appears before understanding. Normalize confusion as part of thinking, not as a personal shortcoming.

Training the student's inner voice (introduced after the pause)

After pausing, instruct the student to say a brief, neutral or supportive sentence **silently to themselves**. This is not spoken aloud. Over time, this trains students to replace self-judgment with self-guidance.

Examples of what students are trained to say silently to themselves

- It's normal to be confused while learning.
- Confusion means I'm thinking, not failing.
- I don't need to rush to protect my image.
- I can take a moment to figure this out.
- Not understanding yet doesn't define me.
- Asking questions helps me improve.
- I'm allowed to take my time.

Non-negotiable rule

This intervention must be applied consistently. Do not compensate for student discomfort by rushing, rescuing, or softening expectations. The goal is durable self-regulation, not temporary relief.

Key rule: Pause → Normalize confusion → Train inner guidance → Resume learning.