

# Riley's Story -

## How does shame show up in this relationship?

**These notes are intended for use by the teacher to check student annotations and notes made in the APPLY activity; they indicate the different unhealthy behaviours in the relationship.**

When I first met Jamie, everything felt exciting. They were funny, confident, and always made me feel special.

They sent good-morning messages before I was even awake and told me things like, "I've never met anyone like you" and "You make my life better." At first, it felt amazing, like real love. Jamie wanted to spend all their time with me, walk me to class, and video-chat every night. My friends said it was intense, we had only been seeing each other for a couple of weeks, but I thought that just meant we were close.

**Teacher notes:** *Students may not immediately recognise any of the behavior as love bombing and may consider this to be acceptable and normal behaviour in a relationship. This provides a good opportunity to explore context in relationships. If a partner was showing this level of attention and was also demonstrating key aspects of healthy relationships e.g. providing space if the other asks for it, showing trust, mutual respect and care, they may not find this behaviour problematic or a red flag, however, in the context of this story and what happens to Riley it can be seen that this behaviour was an early way to establish a power dynamic that favoured Jamie and that made Riley easier to shame and manipulate because they developed strong feelings very quickly. Experiencing this behaviour can be very confusing for people and so making young people aware that very quickly developing intense relationships should be a warning sign.*

After a couple of months, Jamie started to change little things. They'd ask who I was talking to online, why I hadn't replied straight away, or why I was hanging out with certain friends. If I said I was busy, they'd go quiet or send messages like, "I guess you don't care anymore."

**Teacher notes:** *Riley is starting to notice the change in Jamie's behaviour; they are slowly changing the way they speak with Riley and using shaming language to place the blame for feelings on Riley, rather than taking accountability for their feelings and communicating clearly which could sound like "I feel insecure sometimes, but I know that's not your fault. I want you to enjoy spending time with your friends". The language and actions Jamie uses here are red flags that people should be aware of.*

Whenever I tried to explain myself, Jamie would sigh and say, "You always make out it's my fault," or "You are the one choosing your friends over me". Each time, I'd end up apologising even when I wasn't sure I had done anything wrong.

**Teacher notes:** *in this instance the shaming language intensifies and is targeted towards getting Riley to act or behave in a particular way. In this incident Riley is left feeling like they are the one in the wrong simply for spending time with their friends. As the tension in this situation had been building, Riley was already feeling anxious and worried about Jamie's responses and therefore is quick to apologise when they are not responsible for Jamie's feelings.*

I began to notice how quickly Jamie could switch moods. One day they'd bring me a gift, like my favourite drink or ask me to do something I enjoy like going to the cinema and say, "I'm sorry I said those things to you, I just really like you and want to spend more time with you" and the next they'd accuse me of flirting if I laughed when talking to my friends. They said things like, "You're making me and your friends uncomfortable when you flirt like that."

**Teacher notes:** Students should pay particular attention to how Riley refers to Jamie quickly switching moods; this is a way to keep Riley confused and unsure of how they will be treated, which in turn makes it a much nicer experience for Riley when Jamie shows kindness, care and pays attention to Riley. However the language Jamie is using is still shaming Riley and making them responsible for how Jamie feels. In this instance the honeymoon/calm phase is short lived and this contributes to Riley's desire to act a certain way so that they can appease Jamie and recover the feelings from early on in the relationship. This is the beginning of the cycle of behaviour again and where students should be able to notice the pattern.

Soon, I stopped spending time with my friends as much, I knew it was upsetting Jamie. I told myself it was easier to keep Jamie happy. I felt guilty for making excuses not to see people, but I didn't want an argument and I couldn't talk to my friends about it, I just don't think they would understand. When I did see my friends, I caught myself checking my phone constantly, worried that Jamie might be upset again.

**Teacher notes:** Riley can feel the tension building towards another incident, in anticipation of this and because the feelings of shame have been built up Riley's actions show that they are feeling trapped and conflicted. They recognise the difficulty of the situation they have found themselves in but have started to blame themselves. This can be the most challenging part of the relationship as the victim's self-esteem and wellbeing have been broken down so they can't see the behaviour for what it is and therefore may not recognise they need to safely exit the relationship, they may try to bring back the honeymoon phase by doing what the perpetrator wants or 'rewards' as a way to feel safe.

Now I feel anxious about how Jamie will react to me, I really want the version of Jamie who made me feel amazing at the start. Maybe it's my fault for making it like this? But another part of me knows that person only shows up when I do what they want and I'm not sure how to keep doing that. When they make me feel special I know they care about me really, they just have a funny way of showing it.

I keep wondering, how did I go from feeling loved to feeling like everything's my fault?

**Teacher notes:** over the course of the relationship Riley shows signs of feeling shamed, confused, trapped, anxious and isolated. It is important to highlight to students that these are tactics used by abusers to control the victim. These behaviours are unacceptable in any relationship and if students are concerned about this they must seek help and support.

