



CORBO COUNSELING

Why Do I Keep Shutting Down?

a practical self-check for men

Plain questions about stress, withdrawal, shutdown, irritability, avoidance, pressure and the conversations that keep stalling. No score, no labels, nothing to hand in.

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FREE SELF-CHECK · NOT A DIAGNOSIS

This guide is for reflection and education. It is not a diagnosis, therapy, or a substitute for either. If you are in crisis, call or text 988.

BEFORE YOU START

This is a self-check, not a diagnosis

If people have told you that you go quiet, go cold, or go off, and you are not sure where it comes from, these pages are for you. They are questions, not a test.

I'm Ray, a marriage and family therapist working online with men in New Jersey and New York. Most of the men I sit with are not in crisis. They are working, holding things together, and noticing that something in them has gone flat or sharp.

Plenty of them were sent by a partner, or finally got tired of being this way. You do not need the right words, and you do not need to explain yourself before we start.

What follows is a self-check. It is written in plain language to help you notice patterns you may have stopped seeing. It is not a diagnosis. There is no score at the end, because nothing on paper can tell you what you have.

HOW TO USE THIS

- Take one section at a time. Each one takes a few minutes, not an evening.
- Tick what sounds familiar. There is no right number, and nobody has to see it.
- Answer honestly rather than fairly. This only works if you are not managing how you look.
- Stop if something lands harder than you expected. That is worth noticing, and worth saying out loud to someone.

WHAT THIS ISN'T

This will not measure you, label you, or sort you into a type. The scores and the labels are missing on purpose. A self-check can help you see a pattern clearly. It cannot tell you what the pattern means or what to do about it, and I would not trust anything that claimed it could.

If you finish and think "that is a lot of me", that is not a verdict. It is a place to start a conversation with someone.

SELF-CHECK 1 OF 7

Stress you stopped noticing

WHAT IT CAN LOOK LIKE

Stress is hard to spot once it has been there long enough to feel normal. It shows up as a tight chest or a clenched jaw, sleep that will not close, an edge in your voice over small things, or a mind that runs the list at two in the morning. From the outside, you often look fine. Inside, the engine never quite turns off.

This is not weakness, and it is not something you should be able to think your way out of. It is a body doing what bodies do when the pressure does not lift, and it is worth taking seriously before it decides something for you.

DOES THIS SOUND FAMILIAR?

- ☐ I am wound up more often than I admit to anyone.
- ☐ I only seem to switch off with a drink, a screen, or a workout.
- ☐ I am short with the people closest to me and easy with everyone else.
- ☐ I cannot remember the last time I felt genuinely unhurried.

ONE SMALL THING TO TRY THIS WEEK

Put one twenty-minute block in your week with nothing in it. No task, no screen, no fixing. If leaving it empty turns out to be the hardest part of your week, that is worth knowing.

SELF-CHECK 2 OF 7

Withdrawal

WHAT IT CAN LOOK LIKE

Withdrawal is the quiet move away: fewer words, another room, present and elsewhere at once. It rarely feels like a decision. It feels like needing a minute that does not end.

DOES THIS SOUND FAMILIAR?

- ☐ I have been in the same room as someone and felt miles away.
- ☐ I go quiet when I am upset, then cannot explain why I went quiet.
- ☐ I would rather sort it out alone than say what I need.

ONE SMALL THING TO TRY

Say one true sentence out loud to the person you have been stepping back from. It can be as small as: I have been quieter than usual, and it is not about you.

SELF-CHECK 3 OF 7

Emotional shutdown

WHAT IT CAN LOOK LIKE

Shutdown is the flat version. The signal goes quiet and you feel very little, often at the moment you would expect to feel a great deal. It can pass for calm from the outside.

DOES THIS SOUND FAMILIAR?

- ☐ I can describe what happened but not what I felt about it.
- ☐ I have gone blank in the middle of a conversation that mattered.
- ☐ The numbness shows up when the pressure is at its highest.

ONE SMALL THING TO TRY

Write down one moment this week when you felt nothing much, then one line about what came just before it. You are looking for the trigger, not for a feeling you are supposed to have.

SELF-CHECK 4 OF 7

Irritability and anger

WHAT IT CAN LOOK LIKE

For a lot of men, anger arrives before anything else can. It is faster than sadness, faster than fear, and it usually works. It moves you out of the helpless feeling and into doing something. The trouble is that it lands on the people nearby, and afterwards you are left with a worse version of the same problem.

Anger is not the enemy here. The pattern is that it shows up first and alone, with nothing else allowed through.

DOES THIS SOUND FAMILIAR?

- ☐ I go from fine to furious with almost no gap in between.
- ☐ Small things set me off more often than the big ones do.
- ☐ I have been told my face or my tone is doing something I did not intend.
- ☐ Afterwards I feel worse rather than better.

ONE SMALL THING TO TRY THIS WEEK

When you feel the heat rising, name it to yourself first and say one sentence out loud before anything else. "I am getting angry about this" is a full sentence, and it buys you a few seconds you would not otherwise have.

SELF-CHECK 5 OF 7

Avoidance

WHAT IT CAN LOOK LIKE

Avoidance is the whole family of things you do instead. The conversation you keep not starting. The appointment you keep not booking. The second drink, the extra hour at work, the phone in the other room, the gym at ten at night. Each one on its own is ordinary. Together they are a map of what you are not looking at.

None of it is laziness. Avoidance works: it turns the discomfort down, immediately, every time. That is exactly why it is so hard to stop by deciding to.

DOES THIS SOUND FAMILIAR?

- ☐ There is a conversation I have been not having for months.
- ☐ I keep busy in ways that look responsible.
- ☐ I have told myself I will deal with it when things calm down.
- ☐ I feel a flicker of relief when a plan falls through.

ONE SMALL THING TO TRY THIS WEEK

Name the one thing you have been avoiding, in writing, in a single sentence. Do not do it yet. Naming it is the step this week, and it is often the harder of the two.

SELF-CHECK 6 OF 7

Relationship pressure

WHAT IT CAN LOOK LIKE

When a relationship is strained, home stops being the place you recover and becomes another place you are being assessed. You come in already braced. You read the room before you take your coat off. Ordinary questions start sounding like the opening of a case against you, so you defend yourself before anyone has said anything.

This is usually not about love running out. It is two people managing pressure in ways that keep colliding, and neither of them saying the plain thing underneath.

DOES THIS SOUND FAMILIAR?

- ☐ I brace before I walk in the door.
- ☐ I hear questions as criticism, even when they were not meant that way.
- ☐ I do more to keep the peace than to say what I actually want.
- ☐ I have wondered what leaving would look like, without meaning it.

ONE SMALL THING TO TRY THIS WEEK

Pick one moment when you noticed yourself bracing, and say one plain sentence about it instead of acting on it. "I came in tense tonight, and it was not about you."

SELF-CHECK 7 OF 7

Communication difficulty

WHAT IT CAN LOOK LIKE

This is the one men describe most often. The words are simply not there. You know what you want to say, and it arrives as a shrug, a joke, or silence. Under pressure the vocabulary gets smaller, and the people who love you read the small vocabulary as not caring.

Most of the men I work with can write it. They just cannot say it in the moment, to a face, with the temperature up. That is a skill with a learnable shape, not a fixed part of your personality.

DOES THIS SOUND FAMILIAR?

- ☐ I know what I feel and still cannot find the words out loud.
- ☐ I answer in short sentences and watch it get read as not caring.
- ☐ I do better in writing, or over text, than I do face to face.
- ☐ I leave a hard conversation with the real sentence still unsaid.

ONE SMALL THING TO TRY THIS WEEK

Write the sentence you could not say, then read it aloud once while you are alone. You are not sending it to anyone. You are practicing hearing your own voice say the true thing.

PUT IT SIDE BY SIDE

The pattern, written down

Pick four moments from the last month or two: the same argument, the same silence, the same flat evening, the same week that went missing. Put them next to each other and the shape usually shows itself.

Four moments, four columns. Keep every entry short.

THE SITUATION	WHAT I FELT IN MY BODY	WHAT I DID	WHAT I WISHED I HAD DONE

WHAT THESE HAVE IN COMMON

Read down the four rows and write what repeats: the same kind of situation, the same sensation in your body, the same move you make, the same thing you wish you had done instead. One or two sentences is plenty.

If one line turns up in every row, that line is the thing we would start with. It is also the thing a self-check cannot change on its own, which is the honest limit of a page like this.

WHERE THIS GOES NEXT

Practical next steps

Nothing here needs to be solved this week. Four things tend to matter more than the rest.

1. TELL ONE PERSON

Not everyone, one person. A friend, a brother, your partner, a pastor, a therapist. Saying it out loud to one human being beats a year of thinking about it.

2. WATCH THE PATTERN FOR A WEEK

Keep the four rows from the previous page going. Notice the moment before the move you always make, not the aftermath.

3. BE HONEST ABOUT WHEN IT IS TIME FOR HELP

It is time when the same thing keeps happening and you can no longer explain it away. When anger, drinking, or flatness is starting to cost you sleep, work, or people.

4. KNOW WHAT A FIRST SESSION IS LIKE

A conversation about where you are and what you want to be different. I ask questions, you answer what you can, and we decide together whether this is a fit.

Men's therapy, and how to reach me

The men's therapy page explains how I work with men, and the contact page is where you can ask a question or book a free consultation.

Men's therapy corbocounseling.com/mens-therapy

Couples therapy corbocounseling.com/couples-therapy

Contact and booking corbocounseling.com/contact

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