



FLAG TOOLKIT

When something feels off, it is rarely because you are “too sensitive”, it is usually because your nervous system has *picked up* a pattern that your thinking-mind has not fully named yet.

This R.E.D Flag Toolkit is here for the moments you are staring at a message or re-playing a conversation, asking yourself, “Is this me, or is this manipulation?”

What this toolkit can help you with:

Feel less hijacked in the moment

Move from hot flushes, racing thoughts and tight chest into a calmer, more grounded state before you say or decide anything.

Stop second-guessing your instincts

Turn “*Maybe I’m overreacting*” into “*Here is what I felt, here is what happened, and here is what I can see more clearly now.*”

See patterns instead of isolated incidents

Notice when the same kinds of comments, silences or guilt-trips repeat, so you can respond to the pattern, not just the latest episode.

Respond on your own terms

Choose if, when and how you respond, rather than being dragged into apologising, over-explaining or people-pleasing on autopilot.

Protect your energy and self-respect

Decide what is actually kind to you in this moment, whether that is setting a boundary, pausing contact, seeking support or planning a bigger change.

Bring clearer notes to therapy, HR or trusted allies

Walk into those conversations with a calm record of what has been happening, instead of relying on a foggy memory and a knot in your stomach.

Important safety note: If a situation involves threats, stalking, physical danger or serious harassment, this is a moment to prioritise safety and appropriate support. Use whatever emergency or safeguarding routes are available in your country or organisation, and come back to reflective exercises only when you feel safe enough to do so.

The R.E.D Flag Toolkit

This toolkit is built around the R.E.D process and supported by companion worksheets. You can start with the overview page, then move through the Regulate, Evaluate, and Decide worksheets, or simply choose the one that matches the moment you are in. These pages will help you answer three questions:

- What is my main emotion right now?
- What is actually happening here?
- What do I want to do next, for my own wellbeing?

R.E.D stands for:

R – Regulate

First aid for your nervous system.

You notice how you feel, where you feel it in your body, and how intense it is. You choose at least one soothing action and give yourself time away from the situation before you decide anything.

E – Evaluate

Observer mode, not self-attack mode.

You write down what happened in a neutral way, notice what your mind is adding to the story, and gently check for repeated red flags using the prompts.

D – Decide

Response mode, decision with intention. You choose what feels safest and most aligned with your values. You can act, pause, or step away. You record your choice so you can spot patterns over time.

Bring to mind one situation where something doesn't feel right. It may be a message, a comment, a pattern in a relationship, or a feeling you cannot shake.

You can work through the steps in order or dip in where you need support most.

The only non-negotiable is this: if your emotions are high, say at a nine or ten out of ten, start with **R – Regulate**, not with the other person.

This toolkit is not here to diagnose anyone. It is here to help you protect your clarity, your boundaries, and your peace.

R – Regulate: Emotion First Aid Worksheet

R – Regulate

Emotion first aid before you touch the keyboard

This page is about you, not them. It is here to help your body and mind calm down enough that you can think clearly. Use it whenever your emotional intensity feels high, especially if you are about to fire off a message you might regret.

1. Name what you feel and where you feel it

In one or two words:

Right now I feel:

Where in your body do you notice this most?

You might circle or underline, then add your own words.

chest	stomach	throat	jaw
neck	head	hands	arms
legs	whole body	other:	

Rate the intensity:

On a scale from 0 to 10, where 0 is completely calm and 10 is "I am overwhelmed":

Emotional intensity right now: / 10

If you are around 7–10, this page is your priority.

Keep going, take your time, and work through this sheet so your nervous system can settle and your thinking can clear.

2. Simple snapshot: what happened?

Describe the situation in plain, factual language, as if you were a neutral reporter. Just the basics.

In one or two sentences, what happened?

Who was involved? **Name or initials:** _____

Their role in my life: (partner, ex, parent, friend, boss, colleague, other)

How did this reach me? Circle or underline what fits.

Text / DM / email / voice note / phone call / face-to-face conversation / social media

Other:

Date: _____ Time: _____

You are not overthinking. You are gathering data. Even this small act helps your brain move from pure reaction into a more observing state.

3. What am I tempted to do with these feelings?

Big feelings pull us in certain directions. Notice your instinct before you choose.

Right now, I am most tempted to:

<input type="checkbox"/> Sit with them and feel them	<input type="checkbox"/> Push them down and carry on
<input type="checkbox"/> Let them burst out at someone	<input type="checkbox"/> Soothe them gently
Other pull I notice:	

For the purposes of this toolkit, choose a soothing option.

This helps you acknowledge the emotion and support your nervous system enabling your next choice to come from clarity rather than activation.

4. Choose one soothing action

Pick at least one small action that feels kind to your body, some ideas:

- Slow, deep breathing for a few minutes
- A short walk, ideally outside
- Drinking water, herbal tea, or having simple food (fruit, soup)
- Stroking a pet, holding a soft blanket, listening to gentle music
- A simple hands-on task: watering a plant, washing the dishes, folding laundry
- Gentle movement: stretching, shaking out your arms and legs

I choose to:

Give yourself at least one hour away from the conversation, device or person before you decide what to do.

Remind yourself: *"I do not respond to emotionally charged messages in under 1 hour."*

5. Check in again after time out

After at least an hour, return to this page and notice what has changed.

Right now, when I think about this situation, my main feeling is:

On a scale from 0 to 10, where 0 is completely calm and 10 is "I am overwhelmed":

Emotional intensity right now:

/ 10

If your intensity dropped even by one point, then this is working for you.

If your number is still very high (around 7–10), it may not be the right moment to act. You might repeat a soothing action, rest, or talk briefly with someone supportive.

If your number feels lower and steadier (perhaps 0–5), you are likely more ready to step into **E – Evaluate** and look at the situation as a detective, not as someone standing in the middle of the fire.

E – Evaluate: Observer Mode & Red Flag Detection

Once your emotional intensity has come down a bit, use this section to look at the situation more clearly, as an observer rather than from the centre of the storm.

1. Observer description – what happened?

Describe what was said or written in a neutral way. You can copy the message here or summarise the key parts.

What was happening just before this interaction?

(boundary, argument, good news, family/work event, nothing obvious, etc.)

Who else might be in the audience?

(1:1, group chat, copied to others, public/social media)

2. Story check – what meaning am I adding?

This message makes me think or believe that I am:

This message makes me believe **they** are:

3. Pull check: what am I feeling drawn to do?

When I sit with this, I feel pulled to (tick or circle any):

<input type="checkbox"/> Apologise quickly to make it go away	<input type="checkbox"/> Over-explain so they understand I'm not the bad person
<input type="checkbox"/> Chase them for reassurance or a reply	<input type="checkbox"/> Keep the peace by saying nothing
<input type="checkbox"/> React strongly (lash out)	<input type="checkbox"/> Withdraw completely
<input type="checkbox"/> Other:	

4. Red Flag Detection: patterns, not just words

Tick or note any that fit. You don't have to use the labels, they are here to guide your thinking.

Gaslighting – “Your reality is wrong.”

- They tell you your memory or perception is wrong.
- They minimise or mock your feelings.
- They deny or rewrite things they clearly said/did.
- You end up doubting your own mind.

Blame-Shifting / DARVO – “You hurt me by calling out my behaviour.”

- When you raise an issue, they instantly make you the problem.
- They attack your character instead of discussing the behaviour.
- Suddenly they are the victim and you feel you should comfort them.

Guilt-Tripping – “You owe me.”

- They remind you of what they've done for you to get their way.
- You are made to feel selfish, ungrateful or disloyal.
- You feel you must prove you are a good/loving person.

Over-the-Top Idealisation / Love-Bombing – “You are everything.”

- Very intense declarations very early on.
- Pressure to move quickly into big commitments.
- Compliments that feel like a wave rather than a warm light.
- You feel flattered but slightly overwhelmed or swept along.

D – Decide: Next Steps & Incident Snapshot

Now that you have regulated and evaluated, choose what to do (or not do) in a way that protects your wellbeing.

1. What is the kindest thing I can do for myself right now?

2. How do I want to respond to this situation, if at all? (type of response)

- No response yet – give myself more time
- Brief written reply (text/email) without over-explaining
- Move this to a voice call or in-person conversation
- Set a clear boundary in writing and then step back
- Choose not to engage further and protect my distance
- Other: _____

My next step will be:

3. Incident snapshot for my log

An incident snapshot is a quick, colour-coded note of what happened and how it felt, and keeping a log helps you spot patterns over time so you can trust your evidence instead of doubting your memory.

Colour for this incident (based on my personal definitions):

- Green (safe enough / miscommunication)
- Amber (uneasy / needs attention)
- Red (clearly not okay / needs protection)

Why I chose this colour:

If I want support, who feels safest to approach about this? (friend, therapist, trusted colleague, supervisor, etc.):

If you have completed these pages, you have already done the most important thing.
You slowed the moment down and chose a response instead of a reaction.

A pause is a powerful choice, and your wellbeing deserves priority.