

The Shadow Work *Handout*

What Jung actually meant, why most online shadow work misses it,
and eleven questions worth sitting with.

Shadow work has become a genre of internet content. Most of it is a list of dramatic questions and an invitation to feel bad about the answers. That isn't what Jung was describing, and it isn't especially useful.

This handout is the version a therapist would actually hand you: what the idea is, what it is for, how to do it without hurting yourself, and where it stops being a journalling exercise and starts needing another person in the room.

What the shadow actually is

Carl Jung used *shadow* for the parts of yourself you have put out of sight — not because they are evil, but because at some point they were unwelcome.

A child who is praised for being easy learns to file away demanding. A child whose anger frightened someone learns to file away anger. None of that is a decision; it happens the way water finds a channel. What gets filed away doesn't disappear. It keeps operating from somewhere you can't see it.

The most common misunderstanding

The shadow is not "the bad parts of you." It is **the disowned parts** — and plenty of what people disown is good. Ambition, in a family where wanting things was greedy. Need, in a household where needing was a burden. Tenderness, in a place where it was unsafe. Jung called this the *golden shadow*: the qualities you admire almost helplessly in other people are often the ones you exiled in yourself.

How to tell when you've found one

You cannot go looking for the shadow directly — by definition you can't see it. What you can do is notice its tracks. It tends to show up as a reaction that is **too big for the situation**:

- Someone irritates you far past what they did, and the irritation is oddly specific
- You feel a flash of contempt for a trait you would never name out loud
- You admire someone to a degree that feels almost like ache
- A compliment doesn't land, and something in you actively refuses it
- You catch yourself performing a version of you that you don't recognise
- The same argument keeps arriving with different people

Jung's shorthand for the first three is *projection*: the disowned quality gets seen out there, in someone else, at full volume. The rule of thumb is not "everything that annoys you is your shadow" — some people are genuinely annoying. It is the **disproportion** that is the signal.

Before you start

Three conditions, and they matter

Do this when you are reasonably steady, not at your worst. Shadow work is not a crisis tool. If today is already hard, this is the wrong day.

Stop if you go numb or float. If you notice yourself going blank, watching yourself from a distance, or losing the thread — close the notebook. Feet on the floor, name five things you can see, let the breath out slower than you took it in. That reaction is information, not failure, and it usually means the material needs company rather than solitude.

Some doors need someone else in the room. Where there is trauma, active addiction, or a loss you are still inside of, working alone can open more than you can hold. That is the point at which a therapist stops being optional.

If you are in crisis, stop and use these instead.

988 — Suicide Crisis Helpline. Call or text, any hour, anywhere in Canada, English or French.

911 — if you or someone else is in immediate danger.

This handout is not a crisis tool and is not a substitute for either of them.

Eleven prompts worth sitting with

Write by hand if you can. Answer the one that makes you slightly uncomfortable rather than the one that's easiest. **One prompt is a full session** — working through the list in an evening is a way of avoiding all of them.

1 Who irritates you out of all proportion, and what exactly are they doing?

Be specific about the behaviour. Then ask where you would not be allowed to do that.

2 Who do you admire almost enviously? What do they have permission to be?

The golden shadow. Envy points at something exiled, not something missing.

3 What were you praised for as a child — and what did you have to put away to earn it?

Every reliable role has a cost. The cost is usually the interesting part.

4 What do you most not want people to find out about you?

Not the dramatic answer. The small, embarrassing, ordinary one.

5 Where in your life are you performing, and who is the audience?

Notice whether the audience is even still alive, or still watching.

6 What emotion do you least allow yourself, and what happened the last time you showed it?

Often anger, need, or grief. The last time usually explains the rule.

7 What would you do differently if you were certain nobody would ever hear about it?

This one is about desire, not misbehaviour. Read it that way.

8 What compliment can you not accept? What would you have to believe for it to be true?

Refused compliments mark the boundary of a self-image you are defending.

9 Whose approval are you still working for — and would you actually want their life?

The second half of the question is the one that does the work.

10 What do you judge harshly in others that you have, at some point, done yourself?

Write the incident, not the principle.

11 If the part of you that you like least could speak, what would it say it was protecting you from?

This is the question that turns shadow work from an inventory into a conversation.

What to do with the answers

The point is **not** to fix anything, and it is not to forgive anyone. Jung's term was *integration*: letting a disowned part back into the room, with a job, under supervision. Anger that has been exiled comes back as rage. Anger that has been acknowledged comes back as the ability to say *no* in a normal voice.

Practically: after you write, do one small, boring thing that closes the loop. Make tea. Go outside. Say the sentence out loud to nobody. The closing matters as much as the opening, and most online shadow work skips it entirely.

Where this stops being self-help

A handout can get you to the door. What it can't do is be in the room when something opens that is bigger than the exercise — and with shadow material, that is common rather than unusual.

At TEO, this kind of work sits with **Alison Shaji, MA Clinical Psychology, Registered Clinical Counsellor (RCC)**, who sees clients in **British Columbia and Ontario**. She works psychoanalytically alongside DBT, EMDR, CBT and EFFT, and uses shadow work, inner child work and the empty chair technique — which is to say, the depth end of this and the practical end of it, in the same person.

Sessions are online, evenings and weekends included, with a free 15–20 minute consultation first and no obligation afterward. Enquiries go through the practice and you will be matched with the right clinician for where you live.

Nothing in this handout is a diagnosis, none of it is therapy, and it is not a substitute for working with someone. It describes an idea and offers questions; what you do with them is yours.

TEO Counselling Services Inc. — virtual therapy. Alison sees clients in British Columbia and Ontario; the practice as a whole also covers Alberta, Saskatchewan, Manitoba, and Newfoundland & Labrador.
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