Responsibility Pie Chart

Part 1. What happened and how much I blame myself

Item	Entry
Name	
Counselor or therapist	
Date	

What happened

Include: the event or outcome I feel guilty about or blame myself for, in a sentence or two.

What I tell myself about it

Include: the self-blaming thought in my own words, such as "It's all my fault."

How much of this I think is my fault

Include: a number from 0% to 100%.

How strong is the guilt right now?

0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Not at all										*As strong as it gets*

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Part 2. Everyone and everything that played a part

List every person and circumstance that played a part, such as other people's choices, timing, health, money, chance and what I knew then. Give each one a share of the pie. My own part goes in the last row, after everything else.

Who or what played a part	Share (%)
My own part, which I fill in last:	
Total	100%

My pie

Include: a circle with one slice for each part on my list, sized by its share, or the slices listed from largest to smallest.

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Part 3. Looking again

What I notice when I look at the whole pie

Include: what stands out to me now, in my own words.

How much of this I now think is my fault

Include: a number from 0% to 100%.

How strong is the guilt now?

0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Not at all										*As strong as it gets*

What I will do about my share

Include: anything I want to make right, learn or do differently, and what I can tell myself when the guilt comes back.

If I am in crisis

If I am in danger or thinking about suicide, I call 911 in the United States or Canada. Elsewhere, I call my local emergency number. The numbers I will use:

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Clinician guide: using the responsibility pie chart

- **When it fits.** Use the pie when a client holds themselves fully responsible for an outcome that had several causes. J. S. Beck uses a pie chart to work out relative responsibility for an outcome (Beck, 2021), Greenberger and Padesky (2016) use a responsibility pie for guilt and shame, and in CBT for obsessive-compulsive disorder it can show a client that they are one contributor to a feared outcome among several (Bream et al., 2017).
- **Rate first.** Have the client put a number from 0% to 100% on their belief that they are to blame for the outcome, and rate how strong the guilt feels (Beck, 2021).
- **Leave the client's share for last.** Ask about other people, circumstances, timing and chance, give each a share, and have the client estimate their own part last, so that every other explanation gets full consideration (Beck, 2021; Greenberger & Padesky, 2016).
- **Aim for a fair estimate.** The pie weighs the client's part alongside every other one. When the client caused harm, some guilt is healthy, and the work turns to making amends (Greenberger & Padesky, 2016).
- **Take care with harm done to the client.** When the event was sexual abuse the client suffered as a child, responsibility for the abuse lies entirely with the adult (Greenberger & Padesky, 2016). Ask about thoughts of suicide as part of your usual assessment, and follow your setting's crisis protocol whenever a situation involves risk.

Adapted from the descriptions of the pie technique in Beck (2021) and the responsibility pie in Greenberger and Padesky (2016). The layout and wording are original.

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Completed example: Joy (a fictional client)

Joy, 38, is a middle school teacher in outpatient therapy for depression. Her mother, who has diabetes, spent a week in the hospital in November. Joy filled in this worksheet with her therapist, R.M., at her sixth session, on December 4, 2026. Joy, her therapist and every detail of the case are invented.

Part 1. What happened and how much I blame myself

Item	Entry
Name	Joy
Counselor or therapist	R.M., therapist
Date	December 4, 2026

What happened

Mom spent a week in the hospital in November with high blood sugar. I hadn't called her in two weeks.

What I tell myself about it

"It's my fault she ended up in the hospital." "A good daughter would have noticed."

How much of this I think is my fault

95%

How strong is the guilt right now?

0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	**9**	10
Not at all										*As strong as it gets*

Part 2. Everyone and everything that played a part

Who or what played a part	Share (%)
Diabetes itself, and how fast it can change	30%
Mom stopped checking her blood sugar and didn't tell anyone	20%
The clinic moved her checkup to January	15%
My brother lives ten minutes away and didn't notice either	10%
I live three hours away for my job	10%
My own part: I didn't call her for two weeks during report cards.	15%
Total	100%

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My pie

Diabetes 30%. Mom stopping her checks 20%. My part 15%. The clinic's schedule 15%. My brother 10%. The distance 10%.

Part 3. Looking again

What I notice when I look at the whole pie

My slice is one of six, and most of the pie is the illness and things no one planned.

How much of this I now think is my fault

25%

How strong is the guilt now?

0	1	2	3	4	**5**	6	7	8	9	10
Not at all										*As strong as it gets*

What I will do about my share

Call Mom on Sundays and Wednesdays, go with her to the January checkup and ask my brother to stop by on Saturdays. When the guilt comes back, I'll look at my pie again and remember everything else that played a part.

If I am in crisis

Call 911. My partner, Theo, is my contact.

R.M. asked Joy to list everyone and everything that played a part before she gave her own share, and Joy filled in her own row last. When Joy said she should have called, R.M. agreed that she had played a part and asked what she wanted to do about it, which led to her plan to call twice a week.

References and further reading

Books for clinicians

Beck, J. S. (2021). *Cognitive behavior therapy: Basics and beyond* (3rd ed.). Guilford Press. ISBN 978-1-4625-4419-6.

Bream, V., Challacombe, F., Palmer, A., & Salkovskis, P. (2017). *Cognitive behaviour therapy for obsessive-compulsive disorder*. Oxford University Press. ISBN 978-0-19-870326-6.

Books for clients

Greenberger, D., & Padesky, C. A. (2016). *Mind over mood: Change how you feel by changing the way you think* (2nd ed.). Guilford Press. ISBN 978-1-4625-2042-8.

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