

Conversation 3: The Cost of Survival

What Protected Me *Then* May Be Hurting Me Now

In Conversation Two, we explored an idea that may have changed the way you view yourself: **your coping mechanisms are not signs of weakness - they're signs of intelligent and creative adaptation.**

Your coping mechanisms developed for a reason. They protected you. For many people, that realisation brings a profound sense of relief.

- ♥ The people-pleaser is no longer simply weak.
- ♥ The perfectionist is no longer simply obsessive.
- ♥ The anxious person is no longer simply overreacting.
- ♥ The emotionally guarded person is no longer simply difficult.

The patterns begin to make sense, and that matters. But understanding is only part of the story; there's another truth we need to explore: **the things that helped you survive one chapter of your life may be preventing you from fully living in the next.**

This is one of the most difficult realities of healing - not because it's complicated but because it requires us to hold two truths at the same time: a coping mechanism can be both **understandable** and **costly, protective** and **limiting, helpful** and **harmful**. The fact that a pattern once served you does not mean it **still serves you now.**

Imagine a child who learns to walk with a heavy backpack. Perhaps they needed it. Perhaps it carried supplies that helped them survive a difficult journey. Perhaps it contained everything they relied on. The backpack made sense. It was useful, it helped. But what happens when the journey changes? What happens when the child becomes an adult and continues carrying the same backpack full of the same things that once helped them survive their difficult journey?

At some point, what once provided support begins to create strain and discomfort. Not because the backpack is bad or wrong but because it's not packed for this chapter of the journey. New tools are needed now; new ways of living - not just surviving - must now be learned.

Most of our patterns and coping mechanisms are the same now as they've always been. The problem isn't that **we developed them**; the problem is that **we continue carrying them** long after their usefulness has expired.

Because they're familiar, we rarely question them. We simply assume this is who we are. We assume everyone worries this much, apologises this much, doubts themselves this much, struggles to trust, feels responsible for everyone else's emotions, works this hard to avoid mistakes.

What feels normal to us is frequently the result of years of repetition. A pattern repeated often enough stops feeling like a pattern and starts feeling like a reality. This is where survival strategies become difficult to identify because they rarely

announce themselves as coping mechanisms. Instead, they disguise themselves as personality traits.

- ♥ The people-pleaser believes they are kind.
- ♥ The perfectionist believes they have high standards.
- ♥ The overthinker believes they are thorough.
- ♥ The hyper-independent person believes they're strong.
- ♥ The emotionally guarded person believes they're just a private person.

And while there may be truth in those descriptions, they often conceal something deeper: a fear, a wound, a need for protection, **a painful lesson learned long ago.**

The question is not whether these patterns once helped you. The question is whether they're helping you now.

Let's take people-pleasing as an example. It once helped you avoid conflict, it may have helped you gain approval and feel accepted. But what does it cost you today? Honesty, boundaries, the ability to know what you truly want? Maybe it costs you your energy, your time, your peace of mind?

What about perfectionism? It protected you from criticism, helped you achieve success, helped you feel worthy. But what does it continue to cost you? How many opportunities have been delayed because something was not perfect enough? How many moments of joy have been replaced by pressure? How many achievements have felt strangely empty because the finish line kept moving?

Every coping mechanism has a cost, but the cost is not always obvious. Sometimes it appears in our relationships, in our self-esteem, in our health, in our inability to relax, to trust, to receive, connect, rest, or simply be ourselves.

Often, the longer a pattern remains unexamined, the greater the cost becomes. This is why pattern-awareness is so important because we can't make an informed choice about a pattern until we can see both sides of it. The protection and the price.

If we **only see the price** we end up feeling ashamed. If we **only see the protection** we may resist change altogether. Healing our patterns and coping mechanisms requires us to see both sides: this pattern helped me and this pattern is costing me. Both sides are true; one does not cancel out the other.

Change rarely happens just because we hate a pattern or become self-critical about it when we defend it. Change happens when we understand the pattern clearly. When we can say: **I know why you're here, I know what you're trying to do for me, but I can see what you're costing me** – that's a very different conversation from the self-critical one. It's a conversation rooted in maturity, in honesty, and in self-respect.

The goal of this conversation is not to make you reject the behaviours that helped you survive. It's to help you recognise that survival and thriving are not the same thing.

Survival asks: how do I avoid pain?

Thriving asks: how do I create a meaningful life?

Survival asks: how do I stay safe?

Thriving asks: how do I become fully myself?

There comes a point in every healing journey when we realise that the strategies that once protected us are now standing between us and the life we want **because their job is complete**. The challenge is that *they* don't know it yet.

As you continue through The Healing Library Summer School, I invite you to begin looking at your patterns through a new lens. Not simply asking: what is this protecting me from? but also asking: what is this costing me?

Every coping mechanism asks for payment.

- ♥ Sometimes the payment is confidence.
- ♥ Sometimes it's connection.
- ♥ Sometimes it's authenticity.
- ♥ Sometimes it's peace.

The more clearly we see the cost, the more willing we become to create something different.

The patterns that protected you deserve understanding but the life you want deserves honesty - and honesty begins by recognising that what helped you survive *yesterday* may be preventing you from fully living *today*.