

## **Chapter 14**

### **Emotional Safety**

For those of us who have spent years adapting to emotional unpredictability, calm environments can feel insecure and intimidating. This might sound surprising - after all, most people crave peace, stability, and harmony in their relationships. But if we grow up in environments where tension, criticism, emotional withdrawal, or conflict are common experiences, our nervous system becomes highly skilled at anticipating problems. It learns to scan the environment for subtle signs that something might be wrong. These signs trigger a sense of alertness in the body, and the nervous system prepares for the possibility that conflict may follow.

When we experience this state of hypervigilance regularly, it becomes familiar. It feels normal to stay slightly alert, constantly monitoring the emotional atmosphere around us.

When life later becomes calmer or more stable, the nervous system does not immediately recognise the difference. Instead, it may continue scanning the environment for signs of trouble. Moments of peace may feel strangely uncomfortable. You may find yourself wondering whether the

calm will last. You may feel restless or uneasy in situations that are in fact safe. This reaction does not mean that you prefer conflict; it simply means that your nervous system learned to stay alert to protect you - and is still repeating patterns it learned a long time ago.

Emotional safety is something the body learns through repeated experiences. Just as the nervous system once learned to expect tension, it can gradually learn that stability and calm are achievable.

The body doesn't update its expectations through logic alone - it updates through *experience*. When you spend time in environments where disagreement does *not* lead to conflict, where emotions can be expressed without rejection, and where your needs are acknowledged rather than dismissed, your nervous system begins gathering new information. It begins recognising that relationships can remain stable even when tension appears.

As your nervous system adjusts to a different emotional rhythm you may still notice moments of alertness or anxiety. Instead of constantly preparing for tension, your nervous system is slowly learning that safety can be consistent.

This new understanding unfolds gradually as you learn to relax and no longer need to convince yourself that everything is safe.

Simply noticing moments of calm and allowing yourself to remain present is enough. Over time, your nervous system will begin recognising something that may once have felt unfamiliar: **that connection does not always require hypervigilance.**

When you finally recognise that relationships can remain steady without constant adjustment, that emotional safety can exist without requiring you to abandon yourself, and that your needs are just as important as everyone else's, that's the moment when your emotional landscape changes, and life becomes an easier journey to navigate.

## **Reflection Exercise**

### **Noticing Safe Environments**

Take a few moments to reflect on situations where you feel more relaxed or at ease.

#### **Environments where I feel relatively calm include...**

Examples might be:

- certain friendships
- quiet spaces
- time alone
- supportive conversations

---

---

---

#### **What feels different about these environments?**

---

---

---

**How does your body feel in these situations?**

Examples might include:

- relaxed
- steady
- able to breathe more easily
- less alert

---

---

---

**Are there people in your life with whom you feel more emotionally safe? If so, who are they?**

---

---

---

**What behaviours or qualities make these relationships feel safer?**

---

---

---

## Final Reflection

How might your life change if emotional safety became more familiar?

---

---

---

Learning to feel emotionally safe in situations where you once compromised to maintain harmonious connections is an important part of breaking the self-abandonment loop.

As your nervous system gradually learns that connection can exist without constant tension, you may begin to feel something that once seemed impossible: **a sense of emotional stability.**

The ability to remain present in relationships without constantly monitoring the emotional environment *and* the growing confidence that you can stay connected to others without losing connection to *yourself*, are wholly achievable for you - *despite* your emotionally chaotic start in life.