

The Exercise

The Cost of the Coping Mechanism

In Conversation 2, you explored how your coping mechanisms **protected you**. In this conversation we're exploring the other side of the equation. **What has that protection cost you?**

Choose one coping mechanism that shows up regularly in your life. It could be people-pleasing, perfectionism, overthinking, avoiding conflict, emotional withdrawal, seeking approval, hyper-independence, or another pattern that feels familiar to you.

Spend a few minutes answering the questions below. Be as honest as you can. For example: **people-pleasing** helps me avoid conflict, I get approval from others, a sense of belonging, I feel needed. But it costs me exhaustion, resentment, poor boundaries, loss of authenticity, ignoring my own needs, perfectionism. Or **perfectionism** gives me a sense of achievement, recognition, control, reduced criticism, but the cost is pressure, anxiety, procrastination, never feeling good enough, and difficulty relaxing.

Continue writing until you feel you've captured both the benefits and the costs of your patterns and coping mechanisms. Over to you!

What coping mechanism have I chosen to focus on?

What does this coping mechanism give me?

What does this coping mechanism cost me?

Then step back and look at your answers. Ask yourself: **if I continue paying this price for the next five years, am I willing to accept the cost?** Don't rush to answer. Sit with the question. Notice what feelings and thoughts arise. Notice whether part of you already knows the answer.

Finally, complete the following sentence: this pattern helped me survive, but I am no longer willing to pay the price of:

There is no right answer, write whatever feels true; the purpose of this exercise is to raise awareness. Many coping mechanisms begin to loosen their grip the moment we become fully honest

about what they're costing us. Change doesn't start with willpower; it starts with clarity. Clarity begins when we stop looking at what a coping mechanism **gives us** and start looking at what it **takes away**.