

Chapter 2

Why These Patterns Begin

The patterns explored in this workbook never appear suddenly. They develop gradually through thousands of small experiences during our early life.

Children arrive in the world with a simple expectation: when they feel something, someone will help them understand it.

- if a child cries, someone comforts them
- if they feel afraid, someone reassures them
- if they feel confused, someone explains what is happening

Through these repeated interactions, children slowly build an internal map of the world and this map answers important questions:

- is it safe to express how I feel?
- is it safe to need help?
- is it safe to disagree?
- is it safe to fully be myself?

In environments where emotional responses are generally consistent and supportive, the answers to these questions are usually yes:

- feelings are welcomed
- needs are acknowledged
- disagreements are tolerated

Connections remain stable even when needs and emotions appear.

But in some environments, the emotional landscape is less predictable:

- a parent may be loving one moment and distant the next
- certain emotions may be dismissed or criticised
- disagreement may create tension
- someone else's simmering mood may shape the atmosphere of the entire household

Children are extraordinarily sensitive to these emotional patterns. Long before they can explain what they're noticing, their nervous systems are already learning important information: **they notice what causes tension, what brings approval, and what leads to withdrawal or criticism.**

Because connections with caregivers are essential for safety and belonging, children naturally begin adjusting themselves in ways that help maintain safe and inclusive connections. These adjustments are small, emotional calculations that happen automatically – rarely, are they conscious decisions.

A child may learn that:

- being agreeable keeps things calm
- being helpful earns approval
- staying quiet prevents conflict
- managing other people's emotions stabilises the environment

These strategies help the child navigate an emotional landscape that might otherwise feel confusing or unpredictable. At the time, they make perfect sense. But these small adjustments accumulate and the developing nervous system begins to organise itself around an unspoken rule: **maintaining a safe and peaceful connection matters more than expressing myself.**

This rule becomes the foundation for all the emotional connections the child makes and why they suppress their needs in the name of belonging.

As the child grows older, these adaptations become their mindset and personality. The child who learned to prevent tension may be described as easy-going. If they managed emotional situations stoically they may be described as mature. The child who stayed quiet may be described as thoughtful or well behaved.

These qualities are often praised by adults, which reinforces the behaviour even further.

Beneath these qualities, the child is becoming increasingly skilled at reading the emotional environment around them - while becoming less connected to their own internal signals. They learn how others feel and how to keep situations calm, but they may not learn how to remain connected to their own needs and feelings while doing so.

As the child grows into adulthood, the pattern often continues. They become the person others rely on: the supportive friend, the understanding partner, the dependable colleague.

From the outside, they appear emotionally capable and considerate but internally, they may carry a quiet form of fatigue from constantly adjusting their emotional responses to maintain harmony.

Eventually, something begins to shift, and they start noticing patterns that feel difficult to explain.

They may notice:

- how often they silence their reactions
- how quickly they agree when they feel uncertain
- how often they prioritise someone else's comfort
- how rarely their own needs appear in the conversation

These realisations can feel confusing at first; after all, the behaviours involved have been rewarded with praise and safety for years. But once the self-abandonment pattern becomes visible, a new understanding begins to form: the issue was never about caring for others - the issue was that caring for others required leaving themselves behind.

Recognising where patterns of self-abandonment began helps remove something that many people carry for years: self-blame. Like any learned pattern, they can change - once they become visible.

Reflection Exercise

The Emotional Environment You Grew Up In

Take a few moments to reflect on the emotional atmosphere of your childhood home. There is no need to judge or analyse these experiences. Simply notice what comes to mind.

In my home growing up, conflict usually...

When someone expressed strong emotions, people usually...

Approval was often given when I...

Disagreement usually led to...

I learned that it was safest to be...

- agreeable?
- helpful?
- quiet?
- responsible?
- independent?
- invisible?

Write whatever feels true for you.

Final Reflection

Looking back now, how did the emotional environment you grew up in shape the way you respond to your connections with others today?

Understanding where patterns begin does not mean assigning blame. It simply allows you to see how your nervous system learned to maintain connection. Once a pattern becomes visible, something important begins to change: you're no longer **reacting automatically**, you're beginning to **understand yourself**.

This understanding creates the space where new choices become possible.