

## **The Exercise**

### **Meeting Your Coping Mechanisms**

The purpose of this exercise is to help you identify the coping mechanisms that have shaped your life and to understand the role they've played. Many people try to change their patterns before they understand them. We're going to do the opposite!

**Exercise 1:** List the coping mechanisms that appear most often in your life. For example: people-pleasing, perfectionism, overthinking, avoiding conflict, emotional withdrawal, constant busyness, seeking approval, difficulty trusting others, self-criticism, hyper-independence.

**Exercise 2:** This week I'd like you to notice where these coping mechanisms appear in your life. For example: people-pleasing may have helped you avoid rejection – is that something you notice you're practicing in your workplace? Perfectionism may have helped you avoid criticism – is that something you notice you're practicing at home? Overthinking may have helped you feel prepared – is that something you notice you're practicing before a difficult conversation? Emotional withdrawal may have helped you avoid being hurt – is that something you notice you're practicing in relationships? Hyper-independence may have helped you avoid disappointment – is that something you notice you're practicing in life?

Tune in and observe yourself but be gentle; you may find you're both amused and uncomfortable with what you find. Both responses are valid and perfectly normal. Writing down your patterns will raise awareness helping you to challenge them and change them.

Every coping mechanism has both benefits and costs. They protect you, and they limit you. They help you survive, and they prevent you from fully living.

When you've completed the exercises above, spend a few moments looking at what you've written and notice whether anything surprises you, whether any patterns suddenly make more sense, whether you feel less judgmental towards yourself. Most importantly, notice this: the coping mechanisms that frustrate you **today** were often doing their best to help you **yesterday**.

You're not looking at evidence of weakness; you're looking at evidence of intelligence, creativity, strength and adaptation. Deeply appreciating and understanding that about yourself changes everything.

When you realise how you intelligently and creatively protected yourself - just as your brain and body were designed to do - you may also realise that you no longer need your coping mechanisms in quite the same way as you once did.