

The Reflection

Many of us have spent years judging ourselves for behaviours we don't fully understand. We've criticised ourselves for being anxious, overly sensitive, overly responsible, emotionally guarded, controlling, perfectionistic, or overly concerned about what other people think. We've viewed these behaviours as evidence of weakness or failure.

But what if these patterns developed because some part of you was trying to help?

This doesn't mean every coping mechanism is healthy, or that every behaviour should continue, or the impact of these patterns isn't real. It simply means that there's a difference between a pattern that's **harmful** and a pattern that was **originally created to keep you safe**.

When we don't or can't recognise the difference, we often end up fighting ourselves. We become frustrated with our reactions, ashamed of our fears, critical of our needs, and impatient with our progress. We treat our coping mechanisms like enemies.

But imagine how different it would feel to approach them with curiosity instead. Imagine saying: **thank you for protecting me, but I may not need you in the same way anymore**. That's a very different observation: one is rooted in self-rejection, the other is rooted in self-understanding.

As you reflect on your life, you'll begin to recognise that some of the qualities you dislike most about yourself were once trying to solve a problem. Perhaps:

- ♥ People-pleasing helped you avoid conflict.
- ♥ Perfectionism helped you avoid criticism.
- ♥ Emotional barriers helped you avoid disappointment.
- ♥ Self-reliance helped you avoid being let down.
- ♥ Anxiety helped you feel prepared in an unpredictable world.

These patterns may no longer serve you in the way they once did. In fact, some may now be limiting your happiness, your relationships, and your ability to trust yourself.

Healing is not about declaring war on yourself for adapting. Healing is about understanding yourself well enough to know that you no longer need those adaptations to run your life. Before you ask them to change however, it's worth acknowledging the role they played.

This conversation is inviting you to shift your perspective from, why am I like this? to, **what was this trying to protect me from?**

That single question has the power to transform shame into understanding - and as we know by now, understanding is where sustainable change begins. Your coping mechanisms are not evidence that you're broken, they're evidence that you knew how to adapt to survive.

Now you're ready to learn new ways of feeling safe, connected, and valued that don't require you to keep carrying the weight of old patterns of protection.