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Chapter 1

The Self-Abandonment Loop

Many people move through life with the feeling that something in their connections with other people seems slightly out of balance.

From the outside, everything may appear to be working well. People trust you. They come to you when they need advice, reassurance, or help with problems. You care deeply about other people's comfort and safety so feel a natural responsibility to keep relationships functioning smoothly by meeting their needs and suggesting solutions to their problems.

You may be known as the thoughtful one, the reliable one, the person who listens carefully and keeps things steady when situations become complicated. But *inside*, you've started to notice moments where:

- you agree with something you don't truly want
- you soften your responses to keep the peace
- you take responsibility for someone else's emotional comfort

- you replay a conversation afterwards wondering if you said the wrong thing
- you feel strangely exhausted after interactions that seemed ordinary at the time

These moments may appear small and insignificant, but when they happen repeatedly, a pattern begins to form. Over time, maintaining good-natured connections with other people can begin to require that you **leave emotional parts of yourself behind**. Your feelings, your preferences, your instincts, your boundaries. This repeating pattern is known as **The Self-Abandonment Loop**.

The loop develops gradually and often goes unnoticed for many years because the behaviours involved - being accommodating, understanding, flexible, and supportive - are usually seen as positive qualities to be encouraged. But when these qualities require you to consistently override your own internal emotional signals, a quiet imbalance begins to develop.

The Self-Abandonment Loop describes the pattern many people fall into when their nervous system has learned that maintaining connection requires emotional adjustment. The loop typically follows a familiar sequence:

1. Tension Appears

Something in the environment feels slightly uncomfortable. Someone may sound irritated, disappointed, frustrated, or withdrawn. The shift may be subtle, but your nervous system notices it quickly.

You want to maintain a peaceful connection, so the body automatically begins looking for ways to reduce tension.

2. Adaptation

Instead of expressing your true reaction, you adapt yourself.

You might:

- soften your opinion
- reassure the other person
- agree quickly
- minimise your feelings
- apologise unnecessarily
- try to smooth the situation over

These adjustments happen quickly and often without conscious thought. They're strategies your nervous system learned to preserve a safe environment and a peaceful connection.

3. Harmony Returns

The tension fades, the conversation stabilises, the other person seems satisfied, and the situation moves forward. Your nervous system registers this as a success. The strategy worked. Conflict was avoided and the relationship remained stable.

4. Disconnection

But something important was left behind.

- your opinion may not have been expressed
- your feelings may have been minimised
- your boundary may have remained unspoken

In the moment it may not feel significant, but internally a small disconnection has occurred. You remained connected to the other person - but disconnected from yourself.

5. Resentment or Exhaustion

Later, other feelings may appear. You may feel:

- drained
- Resentful

- confused about why the interaction bothered you
- frustrated that you didn't say what you meant

Sometimes the conversation begins replaying in your mind. You may think about what you wish you'd said or you sense that something in the interaction did not feel entirely balanced or authentic.

6. The Loop Repeats

Because the strategy preserved harmony in the moment allowing a peaceful connection to co-exist, the nervous system continues using it. Eventually the pattern becomes automatic. You become highly skilled at maintaining connection, anticipating emotional shifts, and keeping situations calm, but gradually your own internal signals may become quieter in the process.

The Self-Abandonment Loop is not a sign of weakness or failure. It's usually the result of a nervous system that learned early in life that adjusting yourself helped relationships remain stable. But what once helped you maintain connection may now be creating an imbalance between caring for others and remaining connected to yourself.

Recognising the loop is the first step towards changing it. Once you recognise the pattern, you can choose differently in the moments when it appears.

In those moments, a new possibility begins to open up: **staying present in your connections with others, without leaving your needs behind.**

You can print off the summary on the next page, so you always have a quick and convenient way to check in and remind yourself how to recognise and break the loop.

The Self-Abandonment Loop Diagram

1. Tension Appears

A moment of discomfort or emotional uncertainty arises. Someone seems upset, critical, distant, or disappointed.



2. Adaptation

You adjust yourself to prevent conflict or maintain connection. You may soften your opinion, apologise, reassure the other person, or agree quickly.



3. Harmony Returns

The tension fades. The relationship feels stable again.



4. Disconnection

Your needs, feelings, or boundaries remain unexpressed.



5. Emotional Cost

Later you may experience:

- Exhaustion
- Resentment
- Overthinking
- a sense of being unseen



6. The Pattern Repeats

Because the strategy preserved harmony, the nervous system continues using it.

The loop continues.

Breaking the Loop

Change begins when **awareness** appears between **tension** and **adaptation**. That small moment of awareness creates space for new responses such as:

- pausing.
- expressing a preference.
- setting a boundary.
- including your own needs in the conversation.

Over time, these small changes gradually weaken the loop and strengthen your connection with yourself.

You're about to learn to recognise and break the loop.

Reflection Exercise

Recognising the Loop in Your Own Life

Take a moment to think about a recent interaction that stayed in your mind for a while afterwards. Describe what happened.

What tension appeared in that moment?

Did someone seem upset, irritated, disappointed, or distant?

How did you respond?

Did you:

- agree quickly
- soften your opinion
- reassure the other person
- apologise
- minimise your feelings

Write about what you did in that moment.

What did you feel or want to say?

What feeling appeared afterwards?

Examples might include:

- exhaustion
- resentment
- confusion
- replaying the conversation

Final Reflection

Looking back at the situation now, is there anything you wish you had expressed more honestly?

Recognising these moments is the beginning of understanding the pattern and breaking the loop. You don't need to change anything yet. For now, simply begin noticing when the loop appears.

Awareness is where change begins.

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.

Chapter 3

Adaptation Is Not Dysfunction

When people begin recognising patterns of self-abandonment in their lives, a difficult thought often appears: **something must be wrong with me."**

They may wonder why they struggle to say no, why they worry so much about upsetting people, why conflict feels so uncomfortable, and why they often put other people's needs before their own.

It can be tempting to interpret these tendencies as personal weaknesses but most of the behaviours associated with self-abandonment did not develop randomly. They were adaptations.

Adaptation is one of the most powerful abilities human beings possess. It allows us to adjust to environments, relationships, and circumstances in ways that help us survive and maintain connection. If an environment is calm and supportive, a child learns that emotions can be expressed freely and that disagreement does not threaten connection. But if an environment contains tension, unpredictability, criticism, or emotional withdrawal, the nervous system begins

developing strategies that help maintain stability. These strategies might include:

- reading other people's moods quickly
- anticipating reactions before they occur
- keeping the peace
- minimising emotional expression
- becoming helpful or responsible
- avoiding behaviours that might trigger conflict

None of these responses are signs of dysfunction. They are intelligent adjustments to emotional environments that required awareness and flexibility.

A child who becomes skilled at reading the emotional atmosphere around them is not weak, they're perceptive, a child who learns to calm difficult situations is not flawed, they are resourceful, and a child who becomes agreeable to avoid conflict is not defective but adapting to the emotional rules of their environment.

At the time, these strategies serve an important purpose:

- they reduce tension
- they maintain connection
- they help the child feel safer

Because these strategies work in the short term, the nervous system begins using them repeatedly. Over time, they become familiar ways of communicating in emotional connections with other people. Eventually, they become part of a person's identity - along with masking the effort it takes to maintain them.

What once helped preserve connection can gradually begin to create imbalance. Instead of adjusting occasionally, the person begins adjusting constantly. Instead of expressing their own reactions, they begin monitoring everyone else's. Instead of responding to their own needs, they focus primarily on maintaining harmony.

Understanding that these behaviours are not signs there's something wrong with you, but signs that your nervous system learned how to maintain connection in chaotic environments does something powerful: **it replaces self-criticism with curiosity**. Instead of asking: **what's wrong with me?** we ask: **what did my nervous system learn to do?**

This shift in perspective removes shame and creates space for recognition, understanding, and change.

The patterns that were learned can also be unlearned. The goal is not to erase the qualities that once helped you

navigate relationships - your empathy, attentiveness, and ability to care about others are valuable strengths. The goal is simply to expand your range. To learn how to remain connected to others **without losing connection to yourself.** When adaptation becomes balanced with self-awareness, you no longer need to disappear in order to maintain connection. You can remain present in relationships while also remaining present in your own life.

Reflection Exercise

Recognising Your Adaptation Strategy

Take a few moments to reflect on the ways you adapted to maintain stability in your early environment.

Growing up, I often tried to keep things calm by...

I learned to pay attention to...

For example:

- other people's moods
- signs of tension
- what might upset someone
- what might bring approval

One way I adapted to maintain connection was by becoming...

Examples might include:

- helpful
- agreeable
- responsible
- independent
- quiet
- supportive

Write whatever feels true for you.

What did this strategy help you avoid?

For example:

- conflict
- criticism
- disappointment
- emotional withdrawal



Final Reflection

Looking at your answers, can you see how these behaviours may have helped you navigate your environment at the time?

Recognising these adaptations is not about judging the past but about understanding how your nervous system learned to maintain connection. Once these patterns are understood, you can begin deciding which ones still serve you and which ones you no longer need.

Chapter 4

Recognising the Pattern in Your Life

By this point, you may already recognise parts of the self-abandonment pattern in your own experiences. But recognising a pattern in theory and recognising it in daily life are two very different things.

Self-abandonment appears in small moments that often seem insignificant at the time.

- a quick agreement
- a softened opinion
- a feeling you decide not to express
- a request you accept even though you feel tired
- a boundary that remains unspoken

Each of these moments may seem minor on its own but when these choices happen repeatedly, they slowly shape the way we move through relationships:

- we become very skilled at noticing the emotional needs of others
- we learn to anticipate reactions
- we sense when tension might appear

- we adjust our responses to keep situations comfortable

But in the process, our own internal signals fade into the background. Instead of asking: what do I feel about this? our attention may automatically move towards another question: what will keep things running smoothly?

This shift is often so familiar it feels normal but many people only begin noticing the pattern when certain signs begin appearing in their own lives:

- they may feel emotionally exhausted after interactions that seemed ordinary
- they may replay conversations long after they end
- they may feel responsible for other people's emotional reactions
- they may notice resentment appearing in moments where others expect generosity

These experiences can feel confusing, especially for people who genuinely care about others. But when caring for others consistently requires abandoning your own needs, something must change to avoid increasingly imbalanced and resentful connections forming.

Recognising the pattern is the moment where the imbalance begins to become visible. When you consciously notice:

- the moment you agree quickly instead of pausing
- how your attention moves towards managing someone else's feelings
- how your own needs disappear from the conversation

...that's the moment when you shift your automatic responses and become aware of them instead. That's the first step towards breaking the loop and changing the pattern.

You may still decide to be accommodating in certain situations but instead of doing it automatically, you begin doing it consciously. You begin including yourself in the equation.

Recognising the pattern is not about blaming yourself for past behaviours but about learning to see clearly what has been happening. Seeing **every communication** clearly is the foundation for **every meaningful** change.

Reflection Exercise

Where Does the Pattern Appear?

Take a few moments to think about where self-abandonment tends to appear most often in your life. You may notice that the pattern is stronger in certain environments than in others.

I notice the pattern most often when I am with...

For example:

- family members
- romantic partners
- colleagues
- friends
- authority figures

Situations where I tend to abandon my needs are...

Examples might include:

- when someone is upset

- when conflict appears
- when someone asks for help
- when someone is disappointed
- when someone appears judgemental or critical

In these situations, I often respond by...

- agreeing quickly
- staying quiet
- softening my opinion
- reassuring the other person
- trying to keep the peace

Write whatever feels true for you.

After these situations, I often feel...

- drained
- resentful
- confused
- frustrated with myself
- preoccupied with the conversation

Final Reflection

Looking at your answers, what patterns do you notice?

Simply noticing these patterns is an important step. You're beginning to see how the self-abandonment loop appears in real situations.

You don't need to change anything yet.

For now, allow yourself to observe the pattern with curiosity.

Understanding comes before change. Each moment of understanding brings you closer to recognising the places where you can begin accepting and including yourself again.

Chapter 5

The Self-Abandonment Scorecard

Self-abandonment often hides in behaviours that look positive from the outside. You may be known as thoughtful, reliable, accommodating, supportive, or easy-going. But when maintaining these qualities consistently requires ignoring your own needs, an imbalance begins to form.

The Self-Abandonment Scorecard is designed to help you recognise how strongly this pattern may be operating in your life. This is not a diagnostic tool and there are no right or wrong answers. The purpose of this exercise is simply to help you notice how often certain patterns appear in your thoughts, behaviours, and relationships.

As you read each statement, rate how often it feels true for you. Use the following scale:

- 1 – Rarely true
- 2 – Occasionally true
- 3 – Sometimes true
- 4 – Often true
- 5 – Almost always true

Try to answer honestly and quickly without overthinking.

Emotional Patterns

I replay conversations in my mind long after they have ended.

1 2 3 4 5

I worry about upsetting people, even when I've not done anything wrong.

1 2 3 4 5

I feel responsible for how other people feel.

1 2 3 4 5

When someone seems upset, I feel an immediate urge to fix the situation.

1 2 3 4 5

Criticism affects me deeply, even when it's minor.

1 2 3 4 5

Behaviour Patterns

I say yes to things I do not really want to do.

1 2 3 4 5

I soften my opinions to avoid disagreement.

1 2 3 4 5

I apologise even when something is not my fault.

1 2 3 4 5

I minimise my feelings so other people feel more comfortable.

1 2 3 4 5

I hesitate to express disagreement.

1 2 3 4 5

Relationship Patterns

People often come to me when they need emotional support.

1 2 3 4 5

I feel drained after certain social interactions.

1 2 3 4 5

I often prioritise other people's needs before my own.

1 2 3 4 5

I worry that expressing my needs might make me seem difficult.

1 2 3 4 5

I sometimes feel unseen or overlooked in relationships.

1 2 3 4 5

Calculating Your Score

Add together your numbers from all fifteen statements.

Write your total score below.

Total Score: _____

Understanding Your Score

15 - 30

Self-abandonment patterns appear occasionally in your life. You generally feel comfortable expressing your needs, though certain situations may still trigger the pattern.

31 - 50

Self-abandonment patterns appear regularly. You may often prioritise harmony and connection over expressing your own needs.

51 - 75

Your nervous system may be strongly organised around maintaining connection through adaptation. You may frequently adjust yourself to keep relationships stable.

This does not mean something is wrong with you. It simply means that your nervous system learned early in life that adjusting yourself helped maintain connection.

A Note About This Score

This score is not a label. It does not define your personality, and it does not determine how you will behave in the future. Its purpose is simply to provide a snapshot of how often self-abandonment patterns appear in your life right now.

As you move through this workbook, you may begin noticing these patterns more clearly - awareness is the first step toward changing them. The goal is not to eliminate your ability to care about others; the goal is to bring balance back into the equation so that caring for others no longer requires abandoning yourself.

Your empathy and attentiveness are valuable strengths.

Reflection Exercise

Your Results

Looking at your score, and the statements you rated highest, what patterns stand out to you?

Which statements felt most familiar or accurate?

Are there particular situations or relationships where these patterns appear more strongly?

Every pattern that becomes visible is one step closer to understanding how the self-abandonment loop operates in your life.

You're doing brilliantly.

Chapter 6

The Roles We Learn to Play

When self-abandonment develops early in life, it often shapes the role a person plays in their relationships. These roles are not consciously chosen but emerge as the nervous system discovers ways to maintain stability, reduce tension, and preserve connection. What began as an adaptation has slowly become an identity.

We begin describing ourselves in ways that reflect these roles:

"I'm the one people come to for advice."

"I'm the one who keeps everyone calm."

"I'm the responsible one."

"I'm the one who handles things."

These identities can feel accurate and meaningful, but they can also hide the emotional truth of who we'd rather be.

Below are five of the most common roles that develop when someone learns early in life that maintaining connection requires adapting their emotional selves. You may recognise

one of these patterns strongly, or you may see parts of yourself in several of them.

The Five Roles of Self-Abandonment

1. The Peacekeeper

“If everyone is calm, I am safe.”

The Peacekeeper learns very early that conflict is dangerous - not always physically dangerous, although sometimes it is - but emotionally destabilising.

Raised in environments where anger, tension, or volatility were present, their nervous system becomes wired to instantly detect emotional disturbance. Harmony becomes the currency of safety, so the Peacekeeper develops a very specific skillset:

- smoothing over disagreements
- placating strong personalities
- swallowing their own reactions
- managing other people's moods
- avoiding confrontation at all costs

At first glance, the Peacekeeper appears emotionally mature, they seem diplomatic, thoughtful, and calm. But every time the Peacekeeper avoids conflict by sacrificing their own truth,

the message they're sending to themselves is: your feelings are less important than keeping the peace.

Over time this becomes an internal rule. The Peacekeeper stops expressing their emotions - they may even lose access to their emotions entirely. What once protected them now traps them in relationships where their inner world is invisible.

The tragedy of the Peacekeeper is that their greatest fear – conflict – is also the doorway to authentic connection. But because conflict was once associated with danger, they learned to avoid it rather than navigate it. Harmony is maintained but at the cost of their emotional needs.

2. The Over-Responsible One

“If someone is unhappy, it must be my fault.”

This pattern develops when a child grows up around emotionally unstable adults. Children become hyper-attuned, like emotional barometers. They monitor tone of voice, facial expressions, body language, and subtle shifts in atmosphere. Their nervous system learns one essential lesson: other people's emotions are my responsibility.

The Over-Responsible One grows into the adult who absorbs the emotional weight of every room. They feel compelled to fix other people's distress and struggle to tolerate others

being upset with them. They constantly ask themselves what they did wrong, become excellent caretakers, anticipating needs, soothing tensions, and solving problems that are not theirs to solve.

Beneath their obvious capability lies the distorted belief that their job is to manage the emotional lives of others. This belief creates a constant background anxiety, and someone else's bad mood becomes evidence of *their* personal failure.

They feel guilty when someone is disappointed, hurt, angry, or struggling - even when those emotions have nothing to do with them. Relationships with the Over-Responsible One become seriously unbalanced. They carry emotional burdens that belong to others becoming the exhausted regulator of the relationship.

When you believe, like the over-responsible one does, that everyone's emotional state is partly your responsibility, rest becomes impossible.

3. The Explainer

"If I explain enough, they will understand and believe me."

The Explainer is shaped by environments where their experience was repeatedly dismissed, misunderstood,

disbelieved, or questioned. Their feelings were minimised; they were accused of being dramatic, difficult, or wrong. In believing themselves to be untrustworthy, they learn an important strategy: *justify everything*.

As adults, Explainers instinctively over-communicate their reasoning. They provide context, clarify intentions, soften their statements, supply evidence, and walk others carefully through their thinking to avoid being misjudged. What appears to be strong communication is a pre-emptive defence against rejection.

The Explainer fears something very specific: *being misunderstood and punished for it*. They try to remove every chance of misunderstanding before it can occur, but this habit carries a hidden cost. When someone feels compelled to over-explain themselves, they're unconsciously assuming that their basic experience will not be believed on its own. In other words, their feelings require justification.

Over time this erodes self-authority. Instead of simply saying: I don't want to do that, the Explainer says: *I don't want to do that because I'm really tired and I've had a long day, and I've been working on something important, and I just think I might need some time to myself...*

The explanation becomes a request for permission.

4. The Invisible One

“If I vanish, the danger passes.”

Where the Peacekeeper attempts to *manage* conflict, the Invisible One *avoids it entirely*. This pattern develops when emotional confrontation was overwhelming or unsafe.

As a child, expressing anger, disagreement, or hurt may have led to punishment, ridicule, or emotional shutdown from caregivers. The nervous system learned that engagement was dangerous, so withdrawal became the safest option.

The Invisible One learned to shut down during conflict, emotionally detach, withdraw physically and psychologically, go silent, and avoid difficult conversations altogether. This pattern often resembles what we’ve come to recognise as ‘the freeze response.’ The body and mind simply leave the circumstances or conversation. I call this the 4-Dees - dissociation, detachment, disconnection and denial.

To outsiders, the Invisible One may appear calm or indifferent but internally they are overwhelmed. Thoughts scramble, words disappear. The nervous system is flooded.

The safest move is to shut down. Later - often hours or days - clarity returns. They think of everything they wish they'd said but in the moment, the nervous system chose survival.

The tragedy of this pattern is that silence can easily be misinterpreted. People may assume the Invisible One is disinterested, emotionally cold, or avoidant when, in reality, the Invisible One is experiencing a protective shutdown. They are not unwilling to engage, their nervous system simply never learned how to stay present inside conflict.

5. The Performer

"If I'm useful, I'll be valued."

The Performer learns that love, approval, and attention are linked to what they give. Perhaps they were praised for achievements, relied upon for practical support, or became the capable one in a chaotic household. Whatever the origin, the Performer internalises a powerful belief that: my worth comes from what I do for others.

They become productive, available, reliable, helpful, and indispensable. They solve problems, deliver results, and carry responsibilities others avoid. They become the one everybody depends on.

Externally this looks impressive, but *internally* the Performer becomes aware of a frightening truth: who am I if I stop being useful?

Rest becomes uncomfortable. Receiving support feels unnatural. Relationships may feel safest when they are co-dependent. Over time, the Performer may attract people who rely heavily on them, but who, ultimately, take advantage of their reliability. The Performer becomes exhausted but struggles to stop. Their usefulness has become intertwined with their identity. If usefulness disappears, the Performer fears that love might disappear too.

The Core Pattern Beneath All Five

Despite their differences, all five patterns share the same underlying mechanism: harmonious connection is prioritised over self-expression. The child learned that staying connected required:

- smoothing conflict
- managing emotions
- explaining themselves
- disappearing
- performing usefulness

Back then these strategies worked. They protected attachment, but they did so by teaching the nervous system a painful rule: I must leave myself behind in order to stay connected.

That is self-abandonment.

The Turning Point

Healing does not mean rejecting these patterns entirely, after all, each one holds genuine strengths:

- Peacekeepers understand harmony.
- Over-Responsible Ones are deeply empathetic.
- Explainers are articulate and thoughtful.
- Invisible Ones are perceptive and sensitive to emotional threat.
- Performers are capable and dependable.

The task is not to erase these qualities but to remove the self-abandonment element inside each of them.

- The Peacekeeper learns to tolerate conflict.
- The Over-Responsible One learns emotional boundaries.
- The Explainer learns that feelings don't require defence.
- The Invisible One learns to remain present in discomfort.

- The Performer learns that worth exists without usefulness.

Slowly a new internal rule can replace the old one: **emotional connection does not require me to leave my needs behind.**

Understanding These Roles

None of these roles are inherently negative. Each one developed as a way of navigating relationships and maintaining connection. The difficulty arises when the role becomes rigid. When someone feels that they must always be the helper, the strong one, the peacekeeper, or the performer, their ability to express other parts of themselves becomes limited.

Recognising a role you've played can be an important step towards change. Once you see the role clearly, you begin to realise that you are not the role; the role is simply a pattern your nervous system learned. As we now know, loops can be broken and patterns changed. What has been learned can be unlearned and replaced with more empowered knowledge.

You can **remain supportive** without carrying all the emotional weight. You can **be responsible** without *feeling* responsible for everyone. You can **maintain harmony**

without silencing your voice. You can **care deeply** about others while still including yourself in the conversation.

Recognising the roles you learned to adopt creates the opportunity to move through your connections with others with greater flexibility and balance.

Reflection Exercise

Which Role Feels Familiar?

Review the roles described earlier.

Which one feels most familiar to you?

What behaviours or habits make you recognise yourself in this role?

When did you first notice yourself behaving this way?

Try to think about early experiences where this role may have begun.

How has this role helped you in your relationships?

What has this role cost you?

For example:

- emotional exhaustion
- difficulty expressing your needs
- feeling responsible for others
- feeling unseen

Final Reflection

If this role were slightly less dominant in your life, what might change?

Recognising the roles we play does not mean rejecting them completely - after all, these patterns once helped maintain connection and stability. But understanding them allows you to loosen their grip and begin creating relationships where your needs, feelings, and voice are included as well.

Chapter 7

Your Triggers

Self-abandonment usually emerges in response to certain emotional situations that the nervous system has learned to interpret as potentially threatening. These situations are often referred to as **triggers**.

A trigger is not necessarily an intense event. In many cases it can be something small: a tone of voice, a shift in someone's mood, a moment of disagreement, or the possibility that someone might feel disappointed with us.

When these moments occur, the nervous system may react quickly and automatically. You may feel a sudden urge to smooth things over, reassure the other person, apologise, or agree with something you're uncertain about.

This reaction happens because the nervous system is drawing on earlier emotional experiences. It's trying to prevent tension or preserve connection in the fastest way it knows how. This response is not *irrational*. It's simply *familiar*.

For example, someone who grew up in an environment where disagreement led to conflict may still feel a strong

internal response whenever disagreement appears in adulthood. Someone who experienced emotional withdrawal after expressing needs may feel anxious about asking for help. Someone who was criticised for mistakes may feel strong pressure to appear agreeable or accommodating.

The nervous system is not reacting to the present moment alone. It's reacting to patterns it learned earlier in life.

Because these patterns are stored in the body, they often appear before conscious thought has time to intervene. You may notice your response *after* it has already happened - you catch yourself agreeing too quickly or reassuring someone before you've had time to consider what you really feel.

This is why **recognising triggers** is such an important step in interrupting the self-abandonment loop. When you begin to **identify the situations** that activate the pattern, you create the **possibility of pausing** before the automatic response takes over. Instead of **reacting immediately**, you can observe what is **happening inside you**. You may notice the moment when tension appears, the impulse to adapt quickly, or the familiar urge to keep the peace. This awareness does not mean you must respond differently immediately. For now, simply recognising your triggers is enough.

Once the situations that activate the pattern become visible, you'll no longer react automatically but begin instead to understand how the pattern operates in real time. This understanding gradually creates space for new choices.

Reflection Exercise

Identifying Your Triggers

Take a few moments to reflect on situations where you tend to abandon your needs or adjust yourself quickly. Try to think about moments where you felt pressure to maintain harmony or prevent tension.

Situations that tend to trigger my self-abandonment pattern include...

For example:

- when someone seems upset
- when conflict appears
- when someone criticises me
- when someone asks for help
- when someone seems disappointed

Write whatever feels true for you.

When these situations occur, I often respond by...

Examples might include:

- agreeing quickly
- apologising
- reassuring the other person
- staying quiet
- changing the subject

What physical sensations do you notice when these situations appear?

Examples might include:

- tension in the chest
- a tight feeling in the stomach
- racing thoughts
- an urge to fix the situation quickly

What emotions appear most strongly in these moments?

Examples might include:

- anxiety
- guilt
- worry
- fear of conflict
- fear of disappointing someone

Final Reflection

Looking at your answers, do you notice any patterns?

Are there particular types of situations that consistently activate your urge to adapt?

Recognising your triggers is not about avoiding these situations; it's about understanding when your nervous system is most likely to activate the self-abandonment loop.

The more clearly you can see these moments, the easier it becomes to pause before the pattern automatically repeats. During that pause you get to break the loop and reset the pattern.

Chapter 8

The Cost of the Pattern

Self-abandonment works well in the short term. It keeps conversations calm, it prevents conflict, and it protects relationships from immediate tension. In many situations, adapting yourself emotionally appears to work successfully. The interaction moves forward smoothly, and everyone seems comfortable. The strategy works in the moment, the nervous system continues using it.

But many people who consistently prioritise peaceful and harmonious connections above their own emotional needs begin to notice certain feelings appearing in their lives:

- emotional exhaustion
- resentment
- confusion about what they truly want
- a sense of being unseen in relationships

Understanding the cost of self-abandonment is not about criticising yourself for the ways you've adapted; it's about recognising what happens when the pattern continues for such a long time that you forget who you are and how to meet your own emotional needs.

Emotional Exhaustion

One of the most common consequences of self-abandonment is emotional fatigue. When someone is constantly reading the emotional atmosphere around them, anticipating reactions, and adjusting their responses to maintain harmony, the nervous system rarely has an opportunity to fully relax.

You may notice that certain interactions leave you feeling drained - not because the conversation was difficult, but because you spent most of your energy adapting yourself to keep things comfortable.

Resentment

Resentment appears when generosity repeatedly requires personal sacrifice. You may offer support, time, or understanding because you genuinely care about others but if these efforts are rarely balanced by attention to your own needs, frustration may begin to develop.

Resentment feels confusing - you may wonder why you feel irritated in situations where you've chosen to help someone, but resentment is often a signal that something important has

been missing from your connections with others - your own needs.

Losing Contact with Your Own Needs

If your attention has been focused on other people's emotional comfort for many years, it may become difficult to answer simple questions such as:

- What do I want right now?
- What would make this situation better for me?
- What do I really feel about this?

This doesn't mean your needs have disappeared. It simply means they've been receiving far too little attention.

Feeling Invisible

When someone consistently prioritises the emotional needs of other people above their *own* needs, their participation in connections becomes less visible. You may listen carefully, offer understanding, and provide support when others need it, but you may notice that people rarely show you the same care and concern or ask the same questions about you. They've become accustomed to the role you play. You're the supporter, the reliable one, the one who handles things. This

capability masks your own needs from ever being heard and seen and creates a sense of loneliness. Being needed is not the same as being seen, heard, and understood.

Why These Costs Matter

The goal of recognising these costs is not to criticise your ability to care for others - as we've learned, empathy, reliability, and attentiveness are valuable qualities. But when your own needs are consistently abandoned, you must address the balance within your emotional connections and shift the emotional landscape.

Healthy connections allow space for both people to emotionally co-exist. They allow emotional needs to move in both directions and honesty, disagreement, and individual needs to exist without threatening the connection.

Understanding the cost of the pattern helps clarify why change is important. Caring for others should not require you to leave yourself behind.

Reflection Exercise

Noticing the Cost of self-abandonment in Your Own Life

Take a few moments to reflect on how self-abandonment may have affected you over time.

I feel most emotionally exhausted when...

Situations where I notice resentment appearing include...

In my relationships, I sometimes feel...

Examples might include:

- unseen
- taken for granted
- responsible for everyone else
- unsure how to express my needs

Write whatever feels true for you.

When I try to think about my own needs, I notice...

Final Reflection

Looking at your answers, what stands out to you about the cost of this pattern?

Recognising these costs may bring about feelings of regret, but this recognition allows understanding of how the pattern has affected your emotional well-being.

Once the impact becomes clear, the motivation to change becomes stronger. You begin to see that your own needs deserve space in your life as well.

Chapter 9

Losing Contact With Your Needs

A silent impact of self-abandonment is the gradual loss of contact with your own needs. Instead of asking yourself what you feel or need, your focus moves towards maintaining stability in the environment around you.

The habit of not listening to yourself may have been present for a long time but when your needs are consistently postponed or minimised, they don't *disappear* - they just *reappear* in other ways such as:

- fatigue
- resentment
- emotional distance
- a sense of something being slightly out of balance

These signals are messages from the emotional parts of yourself that have not been receiving enough attention. Reconnecting with your needs does not require forceful changes but begins with something simple: listening to yourself, noticing what you feel, doing what brings you energy- and conversely, what leaves you feeling depleted.

Many people think that focusing on their own needs is selfish, but everyone requires understanding, respect, rest, support, and space. Your goal is to bring your needs back into your emotional connection with yourself.

When your needs are included alongside the needs of others, connections become more balanced. You're no longer navigating your relationships with others by leaving yourself behind. Instead, you're remaining present in your own life as you remain connected to others.

That balance allows relationships to become more honest, respectful, stable, and sustainable.

Reflection Exercise

Reconnecting With Your Needs

Take a few moments to reflect on your own needs and preferences. There is no pressure to have perfect answers; simply notice what comes to mind.

What situations tend to leave you feeling energised or content?

What situations tend to leave you feeling drained or frustrated?

When you feel overwhelmed or tired, what do you usually need most?

Examples might include:

- rest
- quiet time
- reassurance
- support
- space

Write whatever feels true for you.

What needs do you find most difficult to express?

Examples might include:

- asking for help
- asking for reassurance
- asking for time alone
- expressing disagreement

Final Reflection

If you began paying closer attention to your own needs, what might change in your daily life?

Reconnecting with your needs does not happen instantly but each moment of awareness strengthens your ability to remain connected to yourself. The more clearly you can recognise your own needs, the easier it becomes to include them in your relationships.

Chapter 10

The Pause

As we know by now, self-abandonment happens when a moment of tension appears. Someone sounds disappointed, asks for help, or a potential disagreement begins to form. Before you have time to fully think about the situation, you find yourself agreeing, reassuring, apologising, or walking on eggshells to avoid conflict. These responses happen so quickly you don't realise until afterwards that you abandoned your own needs. You reflect on the conversation and what you'd have preferred to say.

Responding from panic or fear, determined to keep the peace or maintain someone else's emotional comfort, are some of the reasons the self-abandonment loop can feel difficult to interrupt.

The first step towards changing your self-abandonment pattern is learning to introduce a small pause between the moment of tension and the moment of response.

The pause doesn't need to be long - even a few seconds can create enough space for awareness to appear - but instead

of reacting automatically, that small pause allows you to notice what's happening.

- you notice the tension in the situation
- you notice the familiar urge to smooth things over
- you notice the impulse to agree quickly

That moment of awareness is important. It means the response is no longer automatic but consciously considered. You're beginning to observe the pattern as it unfolds. The pause also gives you time to ask yourself a few simple questions: what do I really want to say here? How do I want to feel? Do I meet their needs or my own?

You may not always know the answers immediately, but simply asking the questions helps bring your attention back towards your own internal signals. The pause doesn't mean you'll suddenly become confrontational or disagree with everything - you may still decide to agree, offer help, or support someone. But the difference is that your response is a thoughtful, considered one that includes your own needs rather than an automatic reaction patterned by your nervous system. You have **chosen your response** rather than **reacted from habit**.

Practising the pause gradually weakens the self-abandonment loop. The space between tension and adaptation becomes wider and within that space, new choices become possible.

Reflection Exercise

Practising the Pause

Think about situations where you often feel pressure to respond quickly. These moments might include requests for help, emotional conversations, or situations where someone appears upset.

Situations where I tend to respond quickly include...

In these situations, I often feel pressure to...

Examples might include:

- agree immediately
- reassure the other person
- apologise
- fix the problem

Write whatever feels true for you.

What might change if you allowed yourself a brief pause before responding?

Practice Exercise

Simple Phrases That Create a Pause

Sometimes a pause can be created by using a simple sentence that gives you time to think.

Examples include:

- "Let me think about that."
- "I'm not sure yet."
- "Can I get back to you?"

- "I need a moment to consider that."
- "I'll check my schedule and let you know."

Write two phrases that feel comfortable for you.

Phrase 1:

Phrase 2:

Final Reflection

How do you imagine it might feel to give yourself more time before responding in difficult situations?

Practising the pause may feel unfamiliar at first. If you've spent years responding quickly to maintain harmony, slowing down can feel uncomfortable. But each time you allow yourself even a small pause, you strengthen your ability to remain present in the conversation while also remaining connected to yourself.

That small moment of space is where the self-abandonment loop begins to loosen its grip.

Chapter 11

Expressing Your Preferences

For many people who have spent years adapting their emotional truth to maintain harmony, expressing personal preferences can feel surprisingly difficult. You may say things like:

- "Whatever you prefer."
- "I don't mind."
- "I'm happy with anything."

At first glance these responses appear flexible and accommodating but when they become a repeating pattern, your preferences slowly disappear from the conversation.

When someone has spent years focusing on what *other people* want, asking themselves what *they* want can feel strange, like another language you're not versed in. Small decisions may feel surprisingly difficult:

- Where would you like to go?
- What would you prefer to do?
- How do you feel about this plan?

Instead of answering directly, you may instinctively look to the other person for guidance.

Expressing preferences is one of the simplest ways to begin reconnecting with yourself. It doesn't require confrontation or extreme changes. It simply means allowing your voice to be included in the conversation. It can be helpful to begin with small preferences:

- choosing a restaurant
- suggesting an activity
- sharing your opinion about a film or book

These moments may seem minor, but they're important. Each time you express a preference, you practise listening to your own internal signals; you also allow others to see more of who you really are. Relationships become more balanced when both people are equally visible.

If expressing preferences feels uncomfortable, remember that this feeling is normal - your nervous system has learned that expressing yourself could create tension or disagreement that leads to exclusion, criticism, and shame.

But in healthy relationships, differences do not destroy connection. They simply reveal the presence of two individuals with their own thoughts, feelings, and desires.

Expressing preferences is not about insisting on getting your own way. It's simply about allowing your perspective to exist alongside the perspectives of others. Those small moments of self-expression help rebuild a sense of internal clarity:

- you begin recognising what you enjoy
- what interests you
- what feels comfortable
- what does not

As your voice gradually becomes more present in your relationships, you're no longer disappearing from the interaction. You're participating in it.

Reflection Exercise

Noticing Your Preferences

Take a few moments to reflect on situations where you tend to defer to other people's choices.

Situations where I usually say "I don't mind" include...

In these situations, what might your actual preference be?

How comfortable do you currently feel expressing your preferences?

- Very uncomfortable
- Somewhat uncomfortable
- Neutral

- Somewhat comfortable
- Very comfortable

Practice Exercise

Expressing Small Preferences

Choose three simple situations where you could practise expressing a preference this week.

Examples might include:

- suggesting a place to eat
- choosing an activity
- sharing an opinion about something

Write your examples below:

Situation 1

Preference I could express:

Situation 2

Preference I could express:

Situation 3

Preference I could express:

Final Reflection

How do you imagine it might feel to express your preferences more often?

Each time you allow your voice to be heard, you strengthen your connection with yourself. Your presence in relationships becomes more visible, you're no longer quietly adapting to everyone else, you're participating as yourself.

Chapter 12

Boundaries

Boundaries are one of the most misunderstood aspects of healthy relationships. Many people imagine boundaries as rigid lines that separate us from others. They may picture conflict, rejection, or confrontation. But boundaries are not walls. They communicate where one person ends and another person begins. They allow individuals to remain connected while also respecting their own needs, limits, and energy.

For people who have spent years maintaining harmony through self-abandonment, boundaries can feel unfamiliar or even uncomfortable. You may worry that setting a boundary will upset someone, you may fear disappointing others, you may feel guilty for saying no. These reactions are understandable. If your nervous system learned early in life that maintaining safety and connection required emotionally denying, compromising, or losing yourself, asserting limits and setting boundaries can feel risky.

Healthy boundaries do not destroy relationships. In fact, they help relationships remain stable and compassionate. Without boundaries, emotional responsibility becomes unbalanced.

One person may carry more of the emotional weight. One person may give more time, attention, or energy than they can comfortably sustain. This imbalance leads to exhaustion, resentment, and confusion. Boundaries help restore balance. They allow you to care for others without losing yourself in the process.

A boundary might sound like:

- "I'm not available for that right now."
- "I need some time to think about it."
- "I can help for a short while, but not all evening."
- "I'm not comfortable with that."

These statements are not acts of rejection but expressions of honesty. They help other people understand what you can realistically offer.

For someone who is used to saying yes automatically, even small boundaries can feel significant. You may notice discomfort when you first begin practising them, but this discomfort does not mean you're doing something wrong; it simply means you're doing something new. Over time, boundaries begin to feel natural.

Expressing limits does not automatically lead to conflict or rejection - relationships can remain stable even when you occasionally say no. Most importantly, boundaries help you recognise that caring for others does not require abandoning your own needs. Boundaries allow both connection and self-respect to exist at the same time.

Reflection Exercise

Where Do You Need Boundaries?

Take a few moments to think about situations where you feel stretched, drained, or uncomfortable. These moments often reveal places where a boundary might be helpful.

Situations where I often feel overwhelmed include...

In these situations, I usually respond by...

Examples might include:

- saying yes automatically
- helping even when I feel tired
- staying longer than I want to
- taking responsibility for solving the problem

What might a healthy boundary look like in this situation?

How might you express that boundary in a calm and respectful way?

Practice Exercise

One Small Boundary

Choose one small situation this week where you could practise expressing a boundary.

Situation:

Boundary I could express:

Sentence I might use:

Final Reflection

How do you imagine it might feel to express this boundary?

Learning to set boundaries takes time particularly if you've spent years prioritising harmony over personal limits. But each boundary you express strengthens your ability to remain connected to others while also remaining connected to yourself. This balance allows relationships to become healthier, more honest, and more sustainable for everyone involved.

Chapter 13

Rebuilding Self-Trust

When someone has spent many years adapting themselves to maintain harmony in relationships, something important can slowly weaken: self-trust.

Self-trust is the quiet confidence that your feelings, instincts, and perceptions are worth listening to. It allows you to recognise when something feels comfortable or uncomfortable. It helps guide your decisions and shape the boundaries that protect your emotional well-being.

But when your internal signals have been repeatedly softened, postponed, or ignored to maintain connection, your relationship with those signals can become uncertain:

- you may begin second-guessing your reactions
- you may wonder whether your feelings are reasonable
- you may ask others for reassurance before trusting your own judgement

This uncertainty does not mean your instincts have disappeared; it means they've not been receiving consistent attention.

Rebuilding self-trust begins with something very simple: noticing your internal responses and allowing them to exist without immediately dismissing them. Feelings of discomfort, a moment of hesitation, a sense that something does not feel right. These signals are valuable, providing information about what's happening within you emotionally.

Paying attention to these signals may feel unfamiliar at first. You may feel uncertain about their meaning, or tempted to dismiss them as you return your attention to meeting and prioritising someone else's needs. But rebuilding self-trust begins with acknowledging what you feel.

You might notice:

- "I feel uncomfortable about this."
- "I feel tired."
- "I feel uncertain."
- "I feel resentful."
- "I feel angry."

This recognition is enough. You don't need to analyse the feeling or act on it immediately. The important step is allowing your internal experience to be visible again.

This simple act of noticing strengthens your relationship with yourself. You begin to recognise patterns in your reactions, and to trust the signals your body and emotions provide. You begin to understand what feels supportive and what feels draining.

As this awareness grows, decision-making becomes clearer. You no longer rely entirely on external cues to determine what is appropriate or acceptable, and you begin including your own perspective in the process.

Rebuilding self-trust is about developing confidence that your experiences and feelings deserve attention. When self-trust strengthens, the self-abandonment loop loses power. Instead of automatically adapting to every situation, you begin responding with greater awareness.

You listen to yourself.

You consider your needs.

You allow your voice to participate in your decisions.

Slowly, something that may have felt distant for a long time begins to return - a sense of alignment between your internal experience and the way you move through the world.

Reflection Exercise

Listening to Your Internal Signals

Take a moment to reflect on situations where you may have ignored or doubted your instincts.

A recent situation where I felt uncertain or uncomfortable was...

In that moment, what did your body or emotions seem to be telling you?

How did you respond to that signal?

Examples might include:

- ignoring the feeling
- reassuring the other person

- convincing yourself it was not important
- adapting your response

Looking back now, do you think your instinct was trying to tell you something?

Practice Exercise

A Daily Self-Check

Over the next few days, pause occasionally and ask yourself three simple questions.

What am I feeling right now?

What do I need right now?

What would help me feel more comfortable in this moment?

Final Reflection

How comfortable do you currently feel trusting your own instincts and feelings?

Rebuilding self-trust happens gradually. Each time you acknowledge your internal signals, you strengthen your connection with yourself. The stronger that connection becomes, the easier it is to move through relationships without leaving parts of yourself behind.

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.

Chapter 15

Returning to Yourself

Recognising self-abandonment is a significant realisation. You begin seeing clearly the moments in your life where you softened your voice, postponed your needs, or prioritised harmony at the expense of your own comfort. You may feel relief that you finally understand patterns that once seemed confusing, but you may also feel sadness when reflecting on how often you left emotional parts of yourself out of the conversation.

Both responses are natural.

Understanding the pattern is not about judging the past. It's about seeing clearly how your nervous system learned to compromise itself to maintain peaceful, safe connections.

Once you see the pattern clearly, something new becomes possible: **you can begin returning to yourself.**

Returning to yourself doesn't mean becoming aloof, confrontational or withdrawing from relationships. It doesn't require extreme changes or sudden declarations. Instead, it unfolds through small moments of awareness and honesty.

You noticing when you agree too quickly, pausing before you offer yet more reassurance, or recognising when your needs are quietly disappearing from the conversation. In these moments, you have a choice. You may decide to be flexible or accommodating in certain situations, but your own perspective begins to take its place alongside the needs of others.

Returning to yourself often begins with very small changes:

- expressing a preference
- taking a little more time before agreeing
- allowing yourself to say, I'm not sure that works for me

You may notice discomfort when you begin expressing your needs, others may notice the change as well and may not always be supportive or complimentary. But returning to yourself is about allowing connection and authenticity to exist at the same time. We know by now that healthy relationships are not built on one person disappearing to maintain harmony. They are built on mutual understanding, honesty, and respect.

Instead of organising your reactions, choices, and decisions primarily around maintaining harmony, you organise them

around a balance between connection, self-honouring and self-respect.

Reflection Exercise

Your Process of Returning

Take a moment to reflect on what returning to yourself might look like in your life.

One way I often leave myself out of conversations is...

A small change I could practise is...

Examples might include:

- pausing before agreeing
- expressing a preference
- asking for time to think
- setting a gentle boundary

What emotions do you notice when you imagine including your needs more openly?

What might become easier in your life if you remained more connected to yourself?

Final Reflection

Write a few sentences describing what “returning to yourself” means to you personally.

Returning to yourself is not about becoming someone new - it's about reconnecting with emotional parts of yourself that may have been quiet for a long time. Each moment of awareness strengthens your ability to remain present in your relationships while also remaining present in your own life.

Healthy connections no longer require your invisibility to remain harmonious.

Chapter 16

The 30-Day Returning to Yourself Reset

Understanding the self-abandonment pattern is an important step, but lasting change rarely happens through insight alone.

The nervous system learns through experience. Patterns that developed through repeated behaviour only begin to shift through repeated new experiences.

That's why this final section focuses on small daily practices.

These practices are not designed to create changes overnight. Instead, they introduce gentle adjustments that help your nervous system become familiar with a different way of responding to your emotional connections with others.

The goal of this reset is simple: **to help you notice the moments where you usually abandon yourself and begin experimenting with small alternatives.**

None of the exercises require confrontation or major decisions. The intention is simply to practise remaining

slightly more connected to yourself in everyday situations. You may notice moments where the exercises feel easy, you may also notice moments where they feel uncomfortable. Both responses are normal. If you've spent many years adapting automatically to maintain harmony, changing that pattern will feel unfamiliar at first.

Approach these exercises with curiosity rather than pressure. You're not trying to become perfect. You're simply creating opportunities to include yourself more often in your own life. Each day focuses on one small awareness or action.

Week 1

Awareness

The first week focuses on noticing the moments when the self-abandonment loop appears. You don't need to change anything yet. Simply observe.

Day 1

Notice when you automatically agree with someone.

What was the situation?

How did it feel?

Day 2

Notice when you minimise your feelings to keep the peace.

What did you feel originally?

What did you say instead?

Day 3

Notice when you apologise even though something was not your fault.

What happened?

Why do you think the apology felt necessary?

Day 4

Notice when you worry about someone else being upset with you.

What situation triggered this worry?

What thoughts appeared?

Day 5

Notice moments where you feel responsible for someone else's emotional state.

What happened?

What did you feel responsible for?

Day 6

Notice when you hesitate to express your opinion.

What were you thinking in that moment?

What might you have said if you felt completely comfortable?

Day 7

Reflection.

Looking back over the week, what patterns did you notice?

Week 2

The Pause

This week focuses on slowing down automatic responses.

Your only goal is to create a pause and small moment of space before answering requests or responding to tension.

Day 8

Pause before responding to a request.

What did you say instead of answering immediately?

Day 9

Use a sentence that gives you time to think.

Example: "Let me get back to you."

How did it feel to pause?

Day 10

Notice the urge to respond quickly.

Did you manage to pause?

What did you notice about that moment?

Day 11

Pause when someone asks for help.

What did you learn about your initial reaction?

Day 12

Pause before offering reassurance.

What did you notice about your instinct to fix the situation?

Day 13

Allow silence in a conversation without immediately filling it.

How did that feel?

Day 14

Reflection.

What did you learn about the power of pausing?

Week 3

Expression

This week focuses on allowing your preferences and opinions to be visible.

Start with very small situations.

Day 15

Express a small preference today.

What did you say?

Day 16

Share your opinion about something simple.

What was the situation?

Day 17

Choose something instead of saying "I don't mind."

What did you choose?

Day 18

Express how you feel about a plan or suggestion.

What happened?

Day 19

Allow yourself to disagree gently.

What did you say?

Day 20

Share something you genuinely enjoy.

How did it feel to express this?

Day 21

Reflection.

How did expressing yourself feel this week?

Week 4

Boundaries

This week introduces small boundaries.

Remember, boundaries do not have to be loud and rebellious; they simply need to communicate your limits.

Day 22

Say no to something small.

What happened?

Day 23

Protect a small amount of your time.

How did you do this?

Day 24

Express a limit. Example: "I can help for a short time."

What limit did you set?

Day 25

Delay a request instead of agreeing immediately.

What did you say?

Day 26

Notice a situation where a boundary would help.

What might that boundary look like?

Day 27

Express one honest response where you might normally soften your reaction.

What did you say?

Day 28

Reflection.

How did it feel to practise boundaries?

Day 29

Notice any changes in how you respond to situations that once triggered self-abandonment.

Final Reflection

The self-abandonment loop develops gradually through repeated adjustments made to preserve harmonious connections. Returning to yourself happens in the same way. The emotional parts of yourself that may have been quiet for many years begin to take their rightful place in your life again.

Where they were always meant to be.

Chapter 17

Moving Forward

By the time you reach this point in the workbook, you may have noticed something important: the patterns explored in this workbook are not abstract ideas; they appear in everyday moments.

- a conversation where you pause before agreeing
- a situation where you express a preference
- a moment where you allow yourself to say no

These small changes represent something significant. You're beginning to include yourself in your own life again. You begin noticing the moments where you once adapted automatically. You pause before responding. You allow your own perspective to appear.

Patterns that developed over many years take time to change, but each moment of awareness gives you the opportunity to make slightly different choices which begin to reshape your connections with others. You still observe someone else experiencing their emotions but you're no longer feeling responsible for fixing them.

Some relationships may adapt easily to these changes; others may take time to adjust. If someone has grown accustomed to you always accommodating their needs, your new behaviour may initially feel unfamiliar to them.

As this new balance develops, you will notice a quiet shift in how you experience your life. You:

- feel less emotionally exhausted
- experience less resentment
- feel more present in your interactions

Most importantly, you begin to:

- trust their instincts
- trust their feelings
- trust their ability to navigate relationships without abandoning themselves in the process

Moving forward does not require intense effort. It simply requires continuing to **notice your internal signals** and allowing them to **participate in your decisions**. Each time you do this, you strengthen your relationship with yourself, and that relationship becomes the foundation for healthier, more balanced connections with others.

Reflection Exercise

What Have You Learned?

Take a moment to reflect on what you've discovered while working through this workbook.

One insight that stood out to me is...

One pattern I now recognise more clearly is...

One change I have already begun to practise is...

One area where I would like to continue growing is...

Final Reflection

How do you want to show up in your relationships moving forward?

You don't need to change everything at once. Simply continue noticing the moments where your needs, feelings, and instincts appear. Allow them to guide you.

Over time, this quiet practice creates a life where:

- connection and self-respect exist together
- caring for others no longer requires leaving yourself behind
- the essence of you, the person you once emotionally spirited away, is fully present again.

How incredible is that?

Final Chapter

A Closing Reflection

If you've worked through this workbook from beginning to end, you've already done something meaningful. You've paused long enough to look at patterns that many people move through life without ever noticing:

- you've reflected on the ways your nervous system learned to maintain connection
- you've recognised moments where you adapted yourself to keep relationships stable
- you've begun exploring how those adaptations may have affected your sense of balance throughout your life

This kind of reflection requires honesty and courage.

Many of the patterns explored in this workbook developed quietly and gradually. They often appear in behaviours that are praised by others – being thoughtful, reliable, understanding, and accommodating.

But when these qualities require repeatedly setting aside your own feelings or needs, they can slowly create a sense of imbalance.

The purpose of this workbook has never been to criticise those qualities - your empathy, attentiveness, and willingness to care about others are strengths. The goal has simply been to bring balance back into the equation and to help you recognise that connection does not require self-abandonment.

Throughout these chapters you may have begun noticing moments where the self-abandonment loop appears in your daily life. Perhaps you recognised situations where you soften your opinions, how quickly you responded when someone asks for help, or realised how often your attention moves toward managing other people's emotions.

These observations are signs of awareness and awareness is where change begins.

You may have also experimented with small adjustments. Pausing before responding, expressing a preference, setting a gentle boundary, or allowing your feelings to exist without immediately dismissing them. These moments may seem simple, but they represent an important shift.

Instead of reacting automatically, you're beginning to move through relationships with greater awareness. You're allowing your own voice to matter.

Change does not happen all at once but through repeated moments of awareness and choice. Some days you may notice yourself responding differently. Other days you may return to familiar habits. Both experiences are part of the process.

What matters is not perfection. What matters is that you have begun paying attention and, over time, this attention strengthens something that may have felt uncertain for a long time: your relationship with yourself.

You begin recognising your instincts more clearly, trusting your feelings, allowing your needs to exist without automatically pushing them aside. As this connection to yourself strengthens, you're able to remain connected to others without leaving yourself behind.

Relationships begin to feel more balanced, conversations feel more honest, your presence in your own life becomes more visible and gradually the self-abandonment loop begins to loosen its hold. In its place, a different pattern begins to form where connection and self-respect exist together, where your needs are not treated as problems, where your voice is allowed to be present in the relationships that shape your life.

You do not need to rush this process. Simply continue noticing your internal signals and allowing them to guide you. Over time, something powerful happens: you stop organising your life around avoiding tension and begin organising it around staying connected to yourself. You rediscover something that may have felt distant for a long time: your own place in the centre of your life.

Final Reflection

Take a moment to write down a few thoughts as you complete this workbook.

One thing I understand about myself now that I did not understand before is...

One way I would like to treat my own needs differently moving forward is...

One reminder I would like to carry with me after finishing this workbook is...

Returning to yourself is not a single decision but an ongoing relationship. Each time you choose to remain connected to your own experience, that relationship grows stronger.

The person you once adapted away from has never truly disappeared. They've simply been waiting for the moment when it felt safe to return.

Afterword

Continuing the Work

If you've completed this workbook, you've already begun something important. You've taken the time to reflect on patterns that often operate quietly beneath everyday interactions. You've noticed the ways your nervous system learned to maintain connection, and you've begun exploring how those patterns may still be influencing your relationships today.

This kind of reflection is not always easy.

Many of the patterns you've explored in this workbook were developed by your nervous system to protect connection and stability. They helped you navigate relationships in ways that made sense at the time.

Recognising them *now* is not about criticising those adaptations; it's about understanding them because once something is understood, it can begin to change.

The process of returning to yourself doesn't end when this workbook ends - in many ways, this is simply the beginning.

As you move forward, you may continue noticing moments where the self-abandonment loop appears. You may notice situations where you soften your reactions, moments where you hesitate to express your needs...these observations are not setbacks, but signs that your awareness is growing. Each moment you recognise the pattern you create an opportunity to respond differently.

You may pause before responding, express your own preferences, you may allow someone else to manage their own emotions without stepping in to fix the situation. These adjustments may seem minor, but over time they reshape the way you move through your life.

As you begin to trust your instincts more, you become more comfortable expressing your needs; you allow your voice to take its place alongside the voices of others. Some days you may feel confident expressing yourself, other days you may return to familiar patterns.

Both experiences are part of learning.

Self-trust grows through repeated moments of listening to yourself so it's important that you continue paying attention to your needs. Connection grows stronger when it includes honesty as well as care, and relationships become more

balanced when everyone involved is allowed to be fully present.

Including you.

A Final Note

If you find yourself returning to certain exercises in this workbook, that is completely natural. Many people revisit sections that help them recognise patterns or reconnect with their internal signals.

You may wish to repeat the 30-day reset or return to the reflection exercises whenever you notice old patterns reappearing. Each time you pause and reflect, you strengthen your ability to remain connected to yourself, and that connection becomes the foundation for healthier connections with others.

Thank You

Thank you for taking the time to work through these pages. Returning to yourself is not always a thrilling event. Often it happens quietly through awareness and honesty, through small moments where your needs and feelings are allowed to exist alongside those of others. Through those moments, the balance that may once have felt out of reach slowly begins to return.

Welcome back.