

Recognising Harmful Relationship Patterns

Noticing patterns of pressure, control and hurt, and how they affect you

Before you begin

This is not a test or a diagnosis of anyone. It cannot tell you what another person is like or why they behave as they do. There are no right or wrong answers. This is simply a way to notice patterns and put your experience into words.

1

Tick what fits

Tick any statement that feels true. Leave out anything that doesn't apply.

2

Pause at the questions

Write a few words or a full answer, whatever feels manageable today.

3

Use it as a starting point

Your answers are for reflection, or a conversation with someone you trust. They are not a conclusion.

A pattern can matter even when you can't yet explain why it is happening.

01 How the relationship has changed

warmth and its shifts

- | | |
|--|---|
| ☐ There were periods when I felt intensely admired or pursued. | ☐ At times I was made to feel unusually special or understood. |
| ☐ The relationship can shift suddenly from warmth to criticism or coldness. | ☐ Qualities once appreciated in me later became things I was criticised for. |
| ☐ I find myself trying to understand what changed. | |

When did I first notice things shifting, and what was happening then?

02 Conflict and repair

when you raise a concern

- | | |
|---|---|
| ☐ My concerns are turned back onto me. | ☐ When I say something hurt me, the conversation becomes about what I did wrong. |
| ☐ My partner rarely acknowledges their part in conflict. | ☐ Apologies, when they happen, don't usually lead to lasting change. |
| ☐ I find myself explaining the same event again and again. | ☐ Arguments leave me confused about what the original issue was. |
| ☐ I avoid raising reasonable concerns because I expect the reaction. | ☐ I feel I must be extremely careful about how I say things. |
| ☐ My partner's feelings seem to carry more weight than mine. | ☐ There seem to be different rules for my partner and for me. |

What happens when you say, "That hurt me"?

What usually happens when you disagree?

03 Confidence in my own perceptions

what I see, remember and feel

Questioning yourself sometimes is normal and human. What matters here is whether it is frequent, growing, or specific to this relationship.

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|---|--|
| ☐ I question whether I remember events correctly. | ☐ Something clear to me is later described as not having happened, happening differently, or being entirely my fault. |
| ☐ I apologise even when I'm unsure what I did wrong. | ☐ I think, "Maybe I really am the problem." |
| ☐ I feel confused after conversations that seemed straightforward at the time. | ☐ I check messages or details because I'm unsure what happened. |
| ☐ I often ask others whether my reactions are reasonable. | ☐ I have become less confident in my own judgement. |

How has my confidence in my own perception changed? ☐ Not at all ☐ A little ☐ Noticeably ☐ A great deal

Something I notice about this change is...

04 Give and take

balance in the relationship

- | | |
|--|--|
| ☐ I am expected to fit around my partner's feelings, schedule or preferences. | ☐ Their needs often take priority over mine. |
| ☐ My partner understands my feelings when it suits them, but less so when my feelings differ from theirs. | ☐ My needs are described as unreasonable, demanding or selfish. |
| ☐ My achievements, friendships or independence can lead to resentment or criticism. | ☐ I give considerably more emotional energy than I receive. |

Over time I have learned that I am allowed to...

...but I am not allowed to...

05 Control and freedom

space to be yourself

Some checking in can be caring. What matters is whether it feels mutual, and whether you feel free to say no without consequences.

- | | |
|--|---|
| ☐ My partner monitors or questions where I am. | ☐ They expect to know who I am with or what I am doing. |
| ☐ They become angry when I spend time with certain people. | ☐ I have become more isolated from friends or family. |
| ☐ My privacy is not respected. | ☐ My work, study or independence is interfered with. |
| ☐ Withdrawal, anger, threats or consequences are used to influence what I do. | ☐ I avoid activities because I expect my partner's reaction. |
| ☐ I feel I need permission for things I used to decide for myself. | ☐ I have changed ordinary parts of my life mainly to prevent conflict. |

Am I changing my behaviour because I want to, or to manage my partner's reaction?

06 Pressure around intimacy and money

consent and money

These can be hard to answer. Take your time, and skip anything you'd rather not answer right now.

- | | |
|---|---|
| ☐ I feel pressured into sex or intimacy when I don't want it. | ☐ My boundaries around intimacy are challenged, criticised or ignored. |
| ☐ Affection or intimacy is used as a reward or punishment. | ☐ Money is used to control, punish or create dependence. |
| ☐ Financial decisions are made without real consideration of my wishes. | ☐ I am expected to contribute financially beyond what feels fair. |
| ☐ I have become less financially independent since the relationship began. | |

07 How this may be affecting me

tick any that fit

These are common responses to ongoing stress in a relationship. They are not signs that something is wrong with you.

- | | | |
|--|---|--|
| ☐ More anxiety | ☐ More self-doubt | ☐ Emotional exhaustion |
| ☐ Difficulty concentrating | ☐ Walking on eggshells | ☐ Watching my partner's mood |
| ☐ Loss of confidence | ☐ Feeling less like myself | ☐ Difficulty making decisions |
| ☐ Guilt when I stand up for myself | ☐ Physical signs of stress | ☐ Feeling trapped |
| ☐ Low mood | ☐ Keeping the peace at my own cost | ☐ Sleep difficulties |
| ☐ Pulling away from friends or family | ☐ Feeling numb | ☐ Fear of my partner's reaction |

08 The “becoming smaller” check

who you were, who you are now

Before this relationship, I was someone who...

People I see less of now...

Things I used to do that I do less of now...

What I used to believe about myself, and what I believe now...

09 Noticing the overall pattern

one possible shape

A relationship can contain real affection, humour, care and remorse, and still contain a hurtful pattern. This is one pattern some people recognise; it is not the only shape a difficult relationship can take.

warmth → tension → conflict → distance → making up → warmth?

- ☐ I recognise this ☐ Partly ☐ Not really ☐ I'm not sure

What tends to happen just before things improve again?

What tends to happen just before things get harder again?

10 Stepping back for your own reflection

Look back over pages 1–3. Write down the three statements that feel most important to you right now.

1 _____

2 _____

3 _____

Something I may have been minimising is...

Something I have been blaming myself for is...

Something I know about my experience, even if my partner sees it differently, is...

Something I would like to talk through with someone I trust is...

11 Your safety you come first

If you are worried about how your partner might react, please keep this worksheet private and don't share your conclusions with them. If you ever feel unsafe, reach out to someone you trust or call emergency services.

Next step

Take a moment to consider what you have noticed. You may want to write down one thing that feels important, one question you still have, or one small step you would like to take.
