

# Identify Your Relational Pattern

*A short workbook to help you understand how your  
nervous system learned to relate*

*Connection Psychotherapy  
Gem Thomson*





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# About this workbook

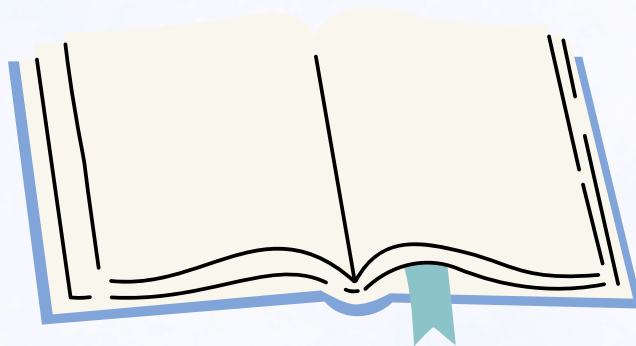
**This workbook is based on contemporary research in:**

- 🌸 Attachment theory
- 🌸 Nervous system regulation
- 🌸 Relational neuroscience
- 🌸 Trauma and developmental psychology

It reflects how the nervous system adapts to maintain connection and stability.

These adaptations are automatic and protective.

Understanding your relational pattern is the first step toward greater flexibility and emotional freedom.





# Why patterns form

**Every nervous system adapts to its emotional environment.**

These adaptations form automatically, through repeated relational experience.

A child does not decide consciously how to adapt. The nervous system learns through observation and emotional consequence.

- ✿ If stability improves when the child takes responsibility, the nervous system learns responsibility.
- ✿ If connection improves when the child adjusts themselves, the nervous system learns to please.
- ✿ If emotional expression creates difficulty, the nervous system learns to reduce emotional exposure.

These adaptations help maintain connection, stability, and emotional safety.

They are intelligent responses to the environment in which they formed.

Over time, they become familiar operating patterns that continue into adult life.

These patterns often reflect learning that occurred at an earlier point in development.

Part of the nervous system may continue to operate according to conditions that existed then, even when circumstances have changed.

This is not a conscious process. It is an automatic protective response designed to preserve stability and connection.

**This workbook helps you identify your primary relational pattern.**



# How to use this workbook

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**Read each pattern description slowly.**

Notice which pattern feels most familiar.

You may recognise yourself clearly in one pattern, or across several.

**Most people have:**

- ✿ One primary pattern
- ✿ One secondary pattern
- ✿ And weaker traces of others

**There is no correct or incorrect result.**

This is simply a way of understanding how your nervous system learned to maintain stability.

# Activation states

Alongside relational patterns, the nervous system also shifts between activation states.

These are levels of intensity, not relational strategies.

## The three activation states are:

### Overdrive

The nervous system increases activation to manage perceived instability. This can feel like urgency, pressure, anxiety, or compulsive action.

### Settled

The nervous system feels safe enough to remain regulated. This allows flexibility, clarity, and emotional access.

### Shutdown

The nervous system reduces activation to protect against overwhelm. This can feel like emotional flatness, fatigue, or withdrawal.

**These activation states can occur alongside any relational pattern.**



# Responsibility Pattern

## Core function:

**Maintain stability and continuity.**

### You may recognise this pattern if:

- 🌱 You naturally take responsibility for situations
- 🌱 You notice what needs to be done quickly
- 🌱 Others rely on you heavily
- 🌱 You feel uneasy when things are left undone
- 🌱 You feel guilty when not helping

## Behavioural urge:

Stabilise the environment. Prevent problems.

## Hidden cost:

Over time, this can lead to exhaustion and reduced awareness of your own needs.



**When this pattern softens, many people experience increased energy and greater internal balance.**

# Pleasing Pattern

## Core function:

**Maintain connection and relational safety.**

### You may recognise this pattern if:

- 🌱 You adjust yourself to maintain harmony
- 🌱 You prioritise others' emotional needs
- 🌱 You avoid creating upset or conflict
- 🌱 You feel responsible for others' emotional state
- 🌱 You monitor others' reactions closely

## Behavioural urge:

Maintain connection. Restore harmony.



## Hidden cost:

Reduced awareness of your own needs and internal pressure.

**When this pattern softens, many people experience greater clarity about their own needs and increased emotional stability.**



# Control Pattern

## Core function:

**Maintain predictability and emotional safety.**

### You may recognise this pattern if:

- 🌱 You prefer clarity and structure
- 🌱 You feel uncomfortable with uncertainty
- 🌱 You regulate emotional expression carefully
- 🌱 You rely on thinking rather than feeling in difficult moments
- 🌱 You maintain high internal standards

## Behavioural urge:

Maintain order and predictability.

## Hidden cost:

Emotional distance and internal tension.



**When this pattern softens, many people experience increased emotional access and greater ease.**

# Vigilance Pattern

## Core function:

**Detect and prevent threat or instability.**

### You may recognise this pattern if:

- 🌱 You are highly observant of others
- 🌱 You anticipate problems early
- 🌱 Your mind remains active even when resting
- 🌱 You find it difficult to fully relax
- 🌱 You feel alert much of the time

## Behavioural urge:

Scan and anticipate.

## Hidden cost:

Chronic tension and mental exhaustion.



**When this pattern softens, many people experience increased calm and improved ability to rest.**



# Withdrawal Pattern

## Core function:

**Reduce relational and emotional intensity.**

**You may recognise this pattern if:**

- 🌸 You prefer independence
- 🌸 You recover energy through solitude
- 🌸 You limit emotional exposure
- 🌸 You rely primarily on yourself
- 🌸 You create distance when overwhelmed

## Behavioural urge:

Create distance and reduce intensity.

## Hidden cost:

Isolation and reduced emotional nourishment.



**When this pattern softens, many people experience increased connection and emotional fulfilment.**

# Emotional Numbness Pattern

## Core function:

**Reduce emotional activation when emotional experience has been overwhelming.**

## You may recognise this pattern if:

- 🌱 You feel emotionally flat at times
- 🌱 Emotional responses feel muted
- 🌱 Motivation feels reduced
- 🌱 Pleasure feels diminished
- 🌱 You feel disconnected from emotional experience

## Behavioural urge:

Reduce emotional activation.

## Hidden cost:

Reduced aliveness and emotional connection.



**When this pattern softens, many people experience increased vitality and emotional engagement.**



# Identify your pattern

**Rate each pattern from 0–3:**

- 0 — Not at all
- 1 — Slightly
- 2 — Moderately
- 3 — Strongly



**Responsibility**

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**Pleasing**

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**Control**

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**Vigilance**

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**Withdrawal**

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**Emotional Numbness**

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# Your primary pattern

✦ Your highest score indicates your primary relational pattern.

✦ Your second highest score indicates your secondary pattern.

✦ These patterns developed automatically through experience.

✦ They reflect how your nervous system learned to maintain stability and connection.

## Understanding patterns

### **These patterns are adaptive responses.**

They helped maintain stability at an earlier point in life.

In adult life, the nervous system may continue to use these same strategies automatically.

Awareness allows increased flexibility.

Emotions such as anxiety, guilt, or shame often act as protective signals.

They help maintain patterns that once preserved stability and connection.

**These emotions indicate that the nervous system is continuing to use strategies learned earlier in life.**



# Change and flexibility

**The nervous system remains capable of change throughout life.**

As safety increases, the nervous system becomes less dependent on automatic strategies.

This allows increased freedom, emotional access, and choice.

As the nervous system updates, these patterns require less effort to maintain.

Many people experience increased energy, greater emotional access, and reduced internal pressure.

Stability begins to arise with less effort.

# Working together

Therapy provides a structured environment to understand and work with these patterns.

## This allows you to:

- ✿ Understand your nervous system more clearly
- ✿ Reduce internal pressure
- ✿ Increase flexibility
- ✿ Develop greater stability

If you would like to explore this further, you can book an initial consultation.

This guide is for educational purposes only and is not a substitute for psychological therapy or medical advice.

It introduces an integrative psychological framework informed by CBT, schema therapy, attachment theory, and clinical practice.

**If you are experiencing psychological distress, please seek support from a qualified health professional.**

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# Final page

*Many people experience a sense of recognition when reading this.*

You may have seen patterns that have been present for a long time. Patterns that made sense in earlier environments, but may now create strain, exhaustion, or emotional distance.

These patterns are not faults. They are adaptations.

With the right therapeutic environment, these adaptations can soften. People often experience greater calm, clarity, emotional connection, and freedom in their lives.

**If you would like to explore this further, therapy can help you understand your patterns and support meaningful change.**

