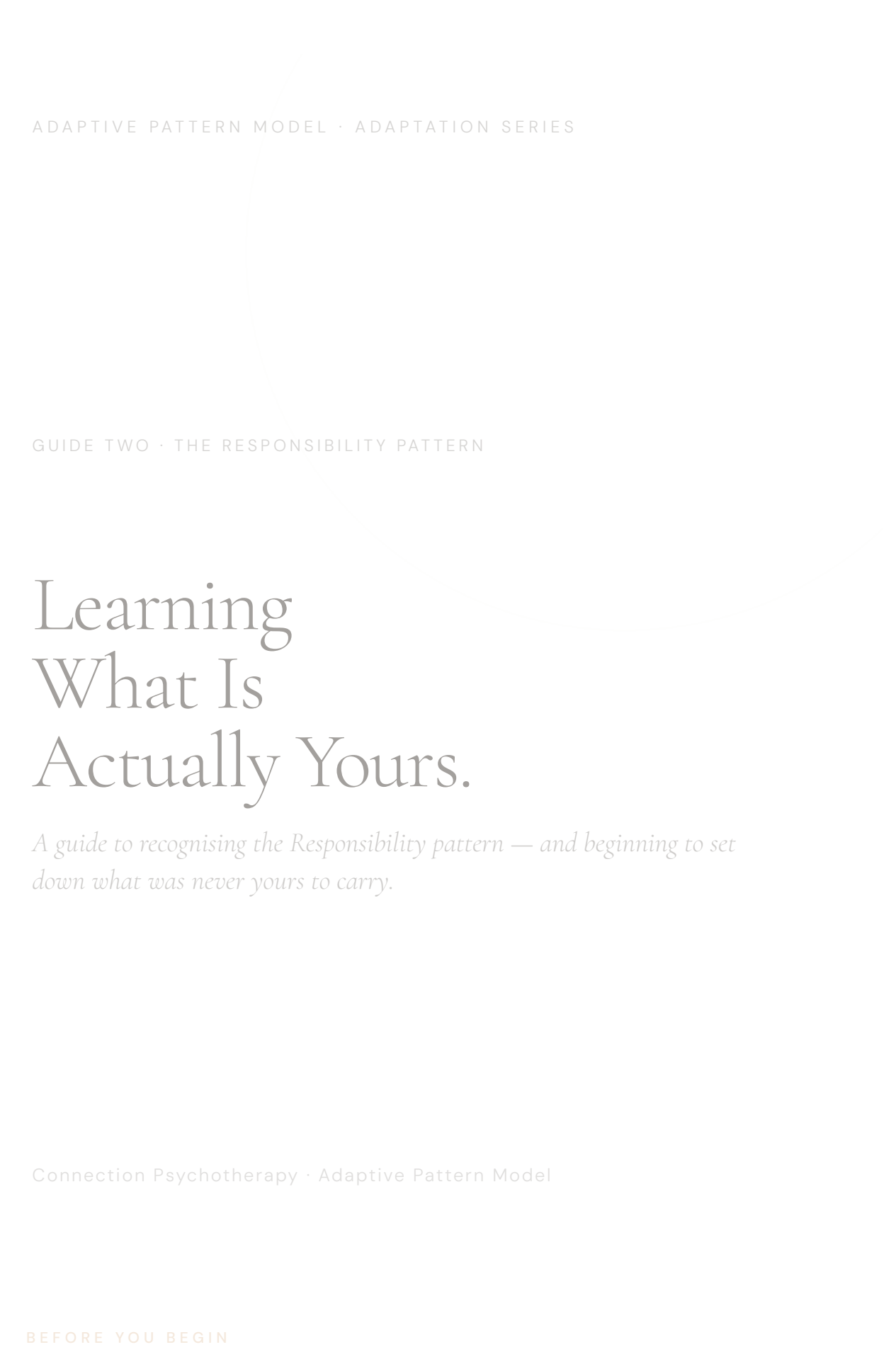




ADAPTIVE PATTERN MODEL · ADAPTATION SERIES

GUIDE TWO · THE RESPONSIBILITY PATTERN

Learning What Is Actually Yours.

A guide to recognising the Responsibility pattern — and beginning to set down what was never yours to carry.

Connection Psychotherapy · Adaptive Pattern Model

BEFORE YOU BEGIN

This guide is not asking you to stop caring.

The Responsibility pattern is often worn as a point of pride — and with good reason. People with this pattern are capable, reliable, and frequently the person others turn to when something needs holding. The caring is real. The competence is real.

What this guide asks is a different question: *at what cost?* And whose weight are you actually carrying?

The Responsibility pattern is one of six adaptations described in the Adaptive Pattern Model (APM). Like all of them, it began as an intelligent response to an early relational environment. The question this guide is interested in is whether it still fits — or whether it has become something you do automatically, regardless of whether it's needed.

"The Responsibility pattern kept things functioning. It also kept you very busy — and very far from the experience of being held yourself."

UNDERSTANDING THE PATTERN

What the Responsibility pattern *actually* is.

"If I don't hold this, it won't be held."

A background conviction — often below conscious awareness — that things will fall apart without your intervention. That others cannot be trusted to carry their share. That your role is to manage, anticipate, stabilise, and prevent.

O1 The Central Fear

"If I stop holding everything together, something will break — and it will be my fault."

The fear is not simply that things will go wrong. It is that wrongness will attach to you — as failure, negligence, or proof that you should have done more. Letting go feels indistinguishable from causing harm.

O2 What Begins to Go Missing

- Rest — genuine rest, not recovery before the next task
- The experience of being looked after — of someone else holding something for you
- Tolerance of others' imperfection — the capacity to let someone do it less well

- Awareness of your own needs — they tend to be deferred indefinitely
-
- The experience of things going fine without your management
-
- The difference between what's genuinely yours to carry and what you've picked up by habit

03 Where It Comes From

The Responsibility pattern frequently forms in families where the child needed to manage adult emotional states — where a parent was unreliable, unwell, overwhelmed, or emotionally absent in ways that required the child to compensate. The child learned that stability depended on them. That if they didn't anticipate, prevent, or manage, things became harder for everyone.

The parentified child grows into an adult who carries weight with extraordinary competence — and often doesn't know how to stop. The weight has become so familiar that its absence feels dangerous rather than restful.

DIRECTION OF CHANGE

The developmental movement.



This movement is not toward indifference. It is toward discernment — the capacity to notice what is genuinely yours to carry, what belongs to others, and what nobody needs to carry at all.

THE CORE QUESTION

"What is actually mine?"

Not: what could go wrong if I don't do this. Not: who needs this from me.
But simply — is this mine? Does it belong in my hands, or have I picked it up by habit?

"Letting someone else struggle is not abandonment. It is the recognition that the struggle belongs to them — and that your carrying it deprives them of the experience of their own competence."

Healthy Trust

The belief that needs to be built — slowly, through accumulated experience:

"Other people are capable. Things can hold without me. I am allowed to rest before I collapse."

WHAT HEALING LOOKS LIKE

How you'll know something is shifting.

EARLY SIGNS

Pausing before stepping in to fix or manage

Noticing exhaustion earlier — before collapse

Asking for help with something small

Letting someone else do something their way

Resting without a reason that justifies it

Noticing what you actually need

LATER SIGNS

Tolerating someone else's imperfect handling of something

Saying "that's not mine to carry" — and meaning it

Allowing others to experience consequences without intervening

Receiving care without deflecting or minimising

Being in a relationship where the weight is genuinely shared

Resting as a practice, not a reward

The pattern in disguise.

Some responses to the Responsibility pattern preserve its underlying logic while changing its surface. These are worth naming.

- Martyrdom framed as generosity — carrying everything, loudly, so others know the cost
- Exhaustion worn as competence — "I'm the only one who can do this" as identity
- Being needed as a substitute for being connected — staying indispensable to avoid intimacy
- Rescuing under a different name — coaching, advising, guiding — when the impulse is the same
- Delegating while still monitoring every detail — the appearance of letting go

Real movement involves tolerating genuine uncertainty about outcomes — and discovering that they are usually fine.

The gradient of practice.

LEVEL ONE · NOTICING AND PAUSING

Before doing anything differently, begin by noticing what you're carrying and where it came from.

- At the end of a day, list what you held. Notice which items were yours and which you picked up.
- When the impulse to step in arises, pause for ten seconds before acting. You don't have to not act — just pause.
- Notice when you rest. Notice what justification you give yourself for it.
- Ask yourself: "Would anything actually break if I didn't do this?"
- Notice where in the body the weight sits. Where do you feel responsibility physically?

LEVEL TWO · SMALL ACTS OF RELEASE

Beginning to let things be held by others — or not held at all.

- Let someone do something their way, without correcting or completing it afterwards.
- Ask for help with something specific — not in a crisis, but as a practice.
- Rest before you reach exhaustion, without a reason that earns it.
- Allow a minor problem to resolve itself without your intervention.

- Say "I can't take that on right now" to one request this week.
- Let someone else experience a consequence you would normally have prevented.

LEVEL THREE · SUSTAINED LETTING GO

Being genuinely held. Allowing shared weight over time.

- Ask for something you need — not something practical, but something relational. Understanding, company, care.
- Receive care without immediately deflecting, minimising, or reciprocating.
- Be honest about your own struggle — to someone who can hold it.
- Stay in a relationship where the weight is genuinely distributed, even when uneven weight feels more familiar.
- Rest for a sustained period — a day, a weekend — without managing anything.

SCHEMA THERAPY CONNECTIONS · JEFFREY YOUNG

If this pattern runs deep.

The Responsibility adaptation frequently overlaps with the following

schema patterns:

- **Self-Sacrifice** — giving disproportionately, from a belief that others' needs take precedence over your own. Healing involves attending to the balance of giving and receiving — tracking it honestly, and learning to ask for what you need.

- **Emotional Deprivation** — a deep expectation that your own emotional needs will not be met, often so ingrained it stops feeling like an expectation and simply feels like how things are. Healing involves identifying what you need and allowing others to provide it.

- **Unrelenting Standards** — holding yourself to standards that are impossible to sustain, often as a way of managing the underlying conviction that ordinary performance is inadequate. Healing involves discovering that good enough is genuinely enough.

Where the Responsibility pattern formed through early caregiving of a parent or sibling — where you were, in effect, the adult before you were ready — therapeutic work can access the grief and anger of the lost childhood that cognitive work alone tends not to reach.

NERVOUS SYSTEM SUPPORT

The CFT Foundations companion guide covers these practices in full.

The Responsibility pattern tends to operate from a highly activated drive system — always doing, always managing, always preventing. The soothing system is often significantly underdeveloped, because rest has felt either unavailable or unearned.

The practices most relevant for this pattern:

- Soothing rhythm breathing — before and after any task that involves releasing control
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- The safe or contented place — building a felt sense of rest that exists independently of having earned it
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- The compassionate self — approaching the parts of you that feel responsible with warmth rather than further demands

WEEKLY REFLECTION

What did you carry this week that wasn't yours?

No judgment. Just noticing.

Was there a moment you paused before stepping in?

Even briefly. Even if you still stepped in afterwards.

Did you rest? Did you ask for anything?

Either counts. Both counts more.

"You are allowed to put it down."

Not everything. Not all at once. But something. Today.

The person you've been holding things for is capable of more than you've allowed them to demonstrate. And the person doing all the holding — you — deserves to find out what it feels like when someone else holds something for them.

