

Why Do I Keep Doing This?

Read the article first. This worksheet accompanies [Curiosity Without Judgment: Understanding the Adaptive Logic of Our Behavior](#) at ThoughtsFromATherapist.com, which explains the two forms of why, how old adaptations keep protecting us, and why widening the frame restores responsibility to scale. Search “curiosity without judgment” on the site to find it.

This sheet is for a pattern, something we keep doing across many moments. For a single reaction, the trigger worksheet fits better. Much of what we call dysfunction is adaptation, and much of what we shame in ourselves is a gesture toward safety or dignity. Choose one behavior that repeats and bothers us at a middle level, not the hardest one. A few words per space is enough.

STEP ONE Name the behavior	One behavior, described the way someone watching would describe it. Not a trait. “I step in and take over when a plan moves slowly” works; “I am controlling” is a verdict.
STEP TWO Ask the curious why	The judgmental why is a verdict disguised as a question. The curious why locates the function of the behavior instead of judging its outcome. <i>Judgmental: Why did I do that again? What is wrong with me?</i> <i>Curious: What part of me believed this would help?</i> <i>Curious: What was I attempting to protect, express, or avoid?</i>
STEP THREE Where it comes from	Sometimes a behavior is a trauma echo. Sometimes it is who we are. Often it is both. We sort among learned coping, temperament, and a strength used outside its ideal context, without forcing one answer.
STEP FOUR Widen the frame	Before deciding what is ours, we include what others were responsible for, the conditions, and the culture. This does not dilute responsibility. It restores it to scale.
STEP FIVE Thank it and update it	We soften our grip on an old strategy through gratitude rather than rejection, then add one new option beside the old one. The old option stays available. It stops being the only one.

A WORKED EXAMPLE: THE PLANNER

THE BEHAVIOR	Stepping in too quickly when others move slowly or hold ambiguity differently.
CURIOUS WHY	It keeps things from falling apart. It gets the plan done on time.
WHERE IT COMES FROM	Maybe a chaotic home, maybe not. Planning can also be a strong cognitive style: how this person naturally arranges the world. Mining childhood for explanations may not create change.
GIFT / OVER-OPERATES	A gift when a trip needs organizing. Over-applied when the people around them need room to move at their own pace.
THE STRETCH	Restraint where the system needs diversity rather than efficiency. A kind of emotional patience, rooted in maturity, not self-doubt.
NEW OPTION	Name the plan, then wait. Let the slower person reach the next step, and notice that what they arrive at is acceptable.

The pattern and its logic

We are looking for the function of the behavior, not a verdict on it.

THE BEHAVIOR

What I do, described the way someone watching would describe it. Where and with whom does it show up most?

How often does it show up? 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

THE CURIOUS WHY

What it was trying to do

Finish the sentences. More than one answer is common.

THE PART OF ME THAT DOES THIS BELIEVES IT WILL HELP BY...

IT WAS HELPFUL, BRIEFLY OR LONG AGO, WHEN...

IT IS ATTEMPTING TO PROTECT, EXPRESS, OR AVOID...

WHERE IT COMES FROM

How much does each source feel true for this behavior, from 0 (not at all) to 10 (very much)? Several can be high at once.

Learned coping: it made sense in an earlier context, a home, a job, a relationship

0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Temperament: it is close to how I am built, a natural aptitude or cognitive style

0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

A strength operating outside its ideal context

0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

STRENGTH AND OVERUSE

Where it serves, where it over- operates

Most patterns carry a real capacity. Name the settings where it fits and the settings where it runs too long or too early.

WHERE IT IS A GIFT

WHERE IT OVER-OPERATES

HOW IT LOOKS FROM THE OUTSIDE

What would the people closest to me say this pattern costs them, and what it gives them?

Widening the frame

Over-responsibility can masquerade as accountability. It reduces a complex situation to a single cause: me.

ONE RECENT TIME IT HAPPENED

A specific moment the pattern showed up, in a sentence or two.

EVERYTHING THAT SHAPED THE MOMENT

Fill in every row before deciding what is mine. Each row can hold something true.

MY ROLE IN THIS INTERACTION OR DYNAMIC:

WHAT OTHERS WERE RESPONSIBLE FOR:

CONDITIONS: STRESS, SLEEP, HUNGER, PHYSICAL DISCOMFORT, SYSTEMIC PRESSURE:

CULTURAL OR HISTORICAL FORCES THAT SHAPED HOW WE EACH REACTED:

WHAT IS MINE TO WORK ON

Honest without being self-erasing. In relationship to my actions without owning what was never fully mine.

THE INSIGHT CHECK

Insight is useful until it becomes a distraction from behaving differently.

IS MORE DIGGING INTO THE HISTORY STANDING IN FOR ACTING DIFFERENTLY? WHAT WOULD ACTING DIFFERENTLY LOOK LIKE?

If the self-blame turns on itself (now I am doing this wrong too), we take a breath and widen the frame again. Blaming ourselves for blaming ourselves is the same pattern, one level up.

Thanking it and updating it

Growth as self-continuity: integrating who we were with who we are becoming.

A WORD TO THE PATTERN

Validation lowers resistance to change. Write it in my own words.

THANK YOU FOR GETTING ME THROUGH...

I DON'T NEED YOU TO PROTECT ME IN THE SAME WAY ANYMORE, BECAUSE...

THERE'S SOMETHING ELSE I NEED NOW:

MY STRETCH

Restraint or assertion

Strength is contextual. It means facing the discomfort the pattern taught me to avoid. Check the moves that fit this pattern.

RESTRAINT (IF THE PATTERN OVER-CONTROLS)

- ☐ Admitting when I am wrong
- ☐ Letting others lead
- ☐ Being emotionally impacted
- ☐ Leaving room for others to move at their pace

ASSERTION (IF THE PATTERN COLLAPSES)

- ☐ Saying what I think
- ☐ Holding my boundary when it is uncomfortable
- ☐ Naming my needs without apology
- ☐ Letting others carry their own emotions

ONE NEW OPTION BESIDE THE OLD ONE

The old pattern stays available. A new option sits beside it.

THE NEXT TIME THE PATTERN STARTS, I COULD...

THE FIRST SMALL SIGN THAT IT IS STARTING:

WHO COULD NOTICE IT WITH ME, WITHOUT SHAMING IT:

WHAT I WILL TELL MYSELF IF THE OLD PATTERN SHOWS UP ANYWAY:

Defensiveness softens when it is seen, not attacked. Avoidance loosens when we gain permission to choose. Shame unwinds when we stop reducing our complexity to a single story.