Dr. Shauna Rae

Mapping My Protective Pattern

UNDERSTANDING WHAT HAPPENS INSIDE ME WHEN I FEEL ACTIVATED

This exercise helps you understand what happens inside you when you feel emotionally activated in your relationship. **There are no right or wrong answers. Be honest and curious.**

STEP 1

The Activation

Think about a recent moment in your relationship when you felt emotionally activated. It doesn't have to be your biggest fight—just a moment where you noticed your protective pattern beginning to emerge.

What happened?
(Describe the situation)

STEP 2

The Story

What story was your mind telling you in that moment?
(Examples below)

Examples:

"They don't really care."

"I'm going to lose them."

"I'm never enough."

"I'm trapped."

"I'll never get this right."

"I have to fix this."

"I need to protect myself."

"I can't trust this."

What was your story?

STEP 3

What Became Threatened Inside You?

Circle the items below that best match what felt most threatened in you.

CONNECTION

- ○ Rejected
- ○ Abandoned
- ○ Lonely
- ○ Disconnected
- ○ Unwanted
- ○ Invisible

WORTH

- ○ Failure
- ○ Ashamed
- ○ Defective
- ○ Not enough
- ○ Inferior
- ○ Criticized

IDENTITY

- ○ Controlled
- ○ Powerless
- ○ Trapped
- ○ Invalidated
- ○ Small
- ○ Misunderstood

SAFETY

- ○ Unsafe
- ○ Overwhelmed
- ○ Alone
- ○ Helpless
- ○ Humiliated
- ○ Predictability lost

Other (list): _____

STEP 4

How Did My Nervous System Try to Protect Me?

Circle the items below that best describe how you responded or acted.

MOVE AWAY (Disconnect)

- ○ Withdraw
- ○ Numb / Shut down
- ○ Avoid
- ○ Hide
- ○ Reject
- ○ Distance myself

MOVE AGAINST (Attack)

- ○ Criticize
- ○ Attack
- ○ Control
- ○ Defend
- ○ Rationalize
- ○ Complain

MOVE TOWARD (Connect)

- ○ People-please
- ○ Over-explain
- ○ Try to fix
- ○ Caretake
- ○ Seek reassurance
- ○ Cling / Pursue
- ○ Placate

OTHER (List any not above)

Other (list): _____

CONTINUING THE WORK

1. What surprised me most about my protective pattern?
2. What was my nervous system trying to preserve within me? *(Not protect me from—preserve in me.)*
3. What does my partner usually experience when I protect myself this way?
4. What do I actually long for underneath this protective pattern?

REMEMBER

Your protective pattern was created for a reason.
At some point, it helped you manage something that felt painful, overwhelming, threatening, or uncertain. Our goal isn't to get rid of it.
It's to understand it, honor what it has been trying to do, and expand our capacity so we have more choices in how we respond.

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Mapping Our Protective Pattern

SEE HOW EACH OF YOUR PATTERNS IMPACTS THE OTHER—AND KEEPS THE CYCLE GOING.

ME

HOW I PROTECT MYSELF

What I do when I feel activated or threatened.

WHAT HURTS / FEELS THREATENED INSIDE ME

What gets triggered or threatened in me.

What I long for underneath: _____

MY PARTNER

HOW MY PARTNER PROTECTS THEMSELF

What they do when they feel activated or threatened.

WHAT HURTS / FEELS THREATENED INSIDE MY PARTNER

What gets triggered or threatened in them.

What they long for underneath: _____

MY PROTECTION lands on you and activates something vulnerable inside you.

YOUR PROTECTION lands on me and activates something vulnerable inside me.

Then I experience the impact of your protection, and the cycle continues.

THE PATTERN WE CREATE TOGETHER

When I feel _____, I protect myself by _____.

When you experience that, you feel _____, and protect yourself by _____.

Then I experience _____, and the cycle continues.

REMEMBER: This pattern makes sense. It once helped both of you feel safer.
Our goal isn't to blame it—it's to understand it so we can create a new cycle of connection, safety, and mutual care.