

What are Protective Patterns?



When we feel unsafe, we react quickly without thinking. These reactions are called **Protective Patterns**. Everyone has Protective Patterns. Sometimes it helps us to react with our Protective Patterns, but sometimes it hurts us. Once we **notice** our Protective Patterns, we can **choose** whether to use them or not.

This is a list of common Protective Patterns. Which pattern do you use the most?



Distrusting



Hypervigilance



Hyper-Caretaking



Avoiding



Defending



Attacking



Our Protective Patterns come out when we feel unsafe.

We could feel physically unsafe, like when we are worried about an attack on our body.

We could feel emotionally unsafe, like when we are worried about someone hurting our feelings.

We could feel socially unsafe, when we feel like someone will do or say something so we feel like we don't belong.

How Protective Patterns help

- They can keep us safe.
- They help us deal with danger.
- They help us react quickly, before thinking.

How Protective Patterns harm

- They can hurt our relationships.
- They can make us stuck, so we don't take actions that can help us.
- They can make us afraid and exhausted.

I can stop my Protective Patterns from hurting me.

- I can be **curious**. I can notice when I am reacting before thinking. In each situation, I can decide whether my Protective Pattern is harming or helping.
- By **noticing** my Protective Patterns, I can learn. "Oops! I used my Protective Pattern and it was NOT helpful. What repair do I need for my relationships? What can I do differently next time?"
- I can instead **choose** Resilience Skills to center myself, connect with others, and collaborate together.



We developed our Protective Patterns when we were children. We learned how to react to keep ourselves safe. They can come from our families, from what happens to us, from our biology, or our personality. With practice, we can get better at **noticing** our Protective Patterns and **choosing** whether to use them.





Distrusting

Am I doubting myself or others?



Protective
Patterns

What does Distrusting look like?

Distrusting Others:

- Distrusting others is when we are cautious of others and don't feel safe with them.
- We feel like we cannot count on them.
- We may be overly critical of them.

Distrusting Ourselves:

- Distrusting ourselves is when we have self-doubt and we think we can't do something, can't do it correctly or that we are not smart enough.
- We may be too critical of ourselves.



I don't trust anybody to use my tools. My daughter keeps asking but she can't even keep her room clean. Why should I lend her my tools?

~ Omari, Father of two



Too many nights I lie awake, thinking about all the things I should have done differently that day. Then I move on to what my husband should have done and my kids should have done.

~ Gracia, mother of three

How does it help?

- Distrusting helps us to stay safe. Maybe the people or situations we distrust could harm us.
- When we distrust ourselves, it helps us to be careful. We might take extra time to do something so we do it well. Or, not say something that could cause trouble.
- Being Distrusting helps us be cautious. We take steps so that people don't take advantage of us. We don't go in a direction that will not serve us.

How does it hurt?

- Distrusting can keep us from getting support from someone.
- If we are too careful, we can get stuck and not do something that is important, like talk to our child's teacher.
- It can harm healthy relationships. Being critical of others keeps us away from them.
- Distrusting can keep us from taking difficult steps that help us to grow. We can miss good opportunities.

Think about (and finish these sentences):

Distrusting helps me stay safe when _____

Distrusting myself or others is good when _____

When I am Distrusting, I hurt myself by _____

When I am Distrusting, I hurt others by _____

If I am less Distrusting, it will help me by _____

What can I do?

- First, I need to have compassion and empathy for myself and others. I also might need to honor my wounds that contributed to the Distrusting.
- I can also practice the Positive Reframing Skill. That means trying to find a different way of thinking about it that includes trust.

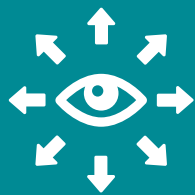


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Hypervigilance

Am I often on the lookout for danger?



What does Hypervigilance look like?

- Hypervigilance is when we see potential danger everywhere.
- We are continually looking for what could harm us or our families.
- This constant anxiety and worry impacts us and those around us.



There is so much to keep track of in family life, play dates, sports practices, homework, food in the fridge. I have a color-coded master calendar, but I am still terrified I will forget something, and my children will suffer from it. I don't want to be the dad that leaves his kid at school on early-release days.

~ Kazumi, Dad



I don't want to end up like my parents who got cancer in their forties. I know there are a lot of additives and strange things in foods and I want to avoid them all. I feel if I stick to my strict diet, I will beat the odds. Of course, that means I say no to a lot of invitations. But I know going off track is not worth the one night of fun.

~ Alonso

How does it help?

- Hypervigilance helps us to stay safe. Maybe we need to watch for threats.
- Hypervigilance helps us to take steps early to avoid potential danger. We put defenses in place.

How does it hurt?

- Hypervigilance can be exhausting. It is tiring to always watch for danger.
- Maybe our sense of fear is not needed and we are afraid of things that actually won't hurt us. We may be overreacting to situations that are actually safe.
- We might say no to something that actually would be a healthy challenge for ourselves or our family.

Think about (and finish these sentences):

Hypervigilance helps me stay safe when _____

When I am Hypervigilant, I hurt myself by _____

When I am Hypervigilant, I hurt others by _____

If I am less Hypervigilant, it will help me by _____

What can I do?

- First, I need to have compassion and empathy for myself and others. I also might need to honor my wounds that contributed to the Hypervigilance.
- I can also work with friends, family, or coworkers to get another view of the risks.
- I can practice the Breathing Mindfully Skill to slow down and relax.
- I can practice the Finding Gratitude Skill, so I appreciate what is actually happening rather than worry about what could happen.





Hyper-Caretaking

Am I taking care of others too much?



Protective
Patterns

What does Hyper-Caretaking look like?

- Hyper-Caretaking is when we take care of others so much that we ignore our own needs.
- When we fail to meet our needs we can become resentful.
- Sometimes we can feel like a victim of always helping others first.



My children come first. I will do anything for them. It is more important to me to care for them than to worry about my eating or exercise habits.

~ Anjuli



My elderly mom has one crisis after another. I am continually asking for time off work. I am afraid I will lose my job. My sister has said she could help, but I know she would just make a mess of it that I would have to clean up.

~ Ahmed

How does it help?

- We like feeling needed by other people.
- We feel valued by them and connected to them.
- It helps us create community.

How does it hurt?

- By Hyper-Caretaking, we neglect our own needs.
- Hyper-Caretaking also hurts others, because we are not encouraging their own ability to take care of themselves.
- We are not helping others learn to step up and take responsibility.

Think about (and finish these sentences):

Hyper-Caretaking helps me stay safe when _____

When I am Hyper-Caretaking, I hurt myself by _____

When I am Hyper-Caretaking, I hurt others by _____

If I am less of a Hyper-Caretaker, it will help me by _____

What can I do?

- First, I need to have compassion and empathy for myself and others. I also might need to honor my wounds that contributed to the Hyper-Caretaking.
- I can practice the Nurturing Myself Skill, and meeting my own needs without abandoning the needs of others.



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Avoiding

Am I running away from my problems?



What does Avoiding look like?

- Avoiding is when we ignore problems.
- We might numb our emotions, misusing drugs or alcohol, eating too much food or spending too much money.
- We might avoid certain people.
- We might say everything will be good when we know deep down that is not true.



I just like to relax with a six pack of beer every night. Put the game on and tune the world out, since I spend all day solving other people's problems. I don't need to hear more from my girlfriend.

~ Sergio



My family argues all the time. I just put my earbuds in and tune them out.

~ Carter

How does it help?

- We may need to Avoid to create a safe space that protects us.
- Avoiding can provide time or space that allows us and others to calm down.
- Sometimes we need time to come up with a way to resolve the issue.

How does it hurt?

- Avoiding prevents us from creating lasting solutions.
- We may make the problem worse by numbing ourselves.
- We may be ignoring our emotions and our needs.
- It can lead to loneliness.

Think about (and finish these sentences):

Avoiding helps me stay safe when _____

When I am Avoiding, I hurt myself by _____

When I am Avoiding, I hurt others by _____

If I Avoid less, it will help me by _____

What can I do?

- First, I need to have compassion and empathy for myself and others. I also might need to honor my wounds that contributed to the Avoiding.
- I can learn to confront directly without Avoiding.
- I can practice the Speak Authentically Skill.
- I can find healthy ways to cope with addictions.





Defending

Am I arguing my point to prove I'm right?



What does Defending look like?

- Defending is when we have to prove we are right, even if it hurts our relationships.
- We respond as if we are constantly being judged or accused.
- We might dig in our heels rather than listening to the other person.



My husband is always nagging me about little things that go wrong. Every little purchase I make, every choice I make that doesn't go quite right. I am constantly explaining myself to him. Why can't he back off?

~ Imani



My mother is always getting on me like I have done something wrong. She spends all her time accusing me of not working hard enough in school, spending too much time with my friends, who knows what else. I have done nothing! We end up fighting all the time.

~ Wang Wei

How does it help?

- We may need to stand up for ourselves.
- We may need to explain our point of view.

How does it hurt?

- Defending can make the conflict worse.
- When we interrupt other people, we shut down our ability to listen to them. We may harm our relationships.

Think about (and finish these sentences):

Defending helps me stay safe when _____

When I am Defending, I hurt myself by _____

When I am Defending, I hurt others by _____

If I Defend less, it will help me by _____

What can I do?

- First, I need to have compassion and empathy for myself and others. I also might need to honor my wounds that contributed to my Defending.
- I can practice the Breathing Mindfully Skill to center.
- I can become curious about the other person's point of view.
- I can practice the Heartfelt Listening Skill to really hear their point of view.





Attacking

Am I being too aggressive towards myself or others?



What does Attacking look like?

- Attacking is when we sound mean and act mean to others.
- We may yell or use our bodies to overpower the other person.
- We blame, criticize, or judge others.
- We can use Attacking against ourselves, blaming ourselves in a way that feels hurtful.



So I lashed out at the coach. So what? He was being a jerk. Can't he see that my daughter is the best player out there and should be playing all the time?
~ Gabriel



I try to keep my children in line. I let them know when they are not up to snuff. That is my job.
~ Richard

How does it help?

- We may need to protect ourselves from emotional or physical harm.
- We feel powerful when we Attack.

How does it hurt?

- When we Attack, others may Attack us back.
- We hurt other people by Attacking them. We harm our relationships.

Think about (and finish these sentences):

Attacking helps me stay safe when _____

When I am Attacking, I hurt myself by _____

When I am Attacking, I hurt others by _____

If I Attack less, it will help me by _____

What can I do?

- First, I need to have compassion and empathy for myself and others. I also might need to honor my wounds that contributed to the Attacking.
- I can become curious about the other person and practice the Empathizing Skill.
- I can create and hold healthy boundaries.
- I can Speak Authentically rather than speaking aggressively.



Thank You FOR READING

This handout is from the *We Are Resilient™: Introductory Handout Set For Families* book by Dovetail Learning, which contains handouts on all the mindsets, patterns and skills in the We Are Resilient™ approach. Purchase the book and learn more at dovetaillearning.org.

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We Are Resilient™: Introductory Handout Set For Families

\$17.00

If you are looking for something to help families, this book provides tools to manage stress, strengthen relationships, and adapt to change. The book of 34 one-page introductory handouts explains the mindsets, patterns, and skills in simple language and provides real-world examples. The Protective Patterns handouts describe how each Protective Pattern might be showing up in our life and how it might be helping or hurting us. The Resilient Skills handouts describe when and how to practice the skills, how families can model and coach the skills, as well as ideas to think about and activities that can help us integrate the skill into our life.

Topics include:

- What is Resilience?
- How Can We Become More Resilient?
- What Are Resilient Mindsets?
- What Are Cultural Patterns?
- What are Protective Patterns?
- as well as a handout for each Resilient Mindset, Protective Pattern, Centering Skill, Connecting Skill, and Collaborating Skill.

Families, teachers, healthcare providers and others will appreciate these helpful handouts.



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