

A FREE GUIDESHEET

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# When you leave yourself to keep the connection.

*A gentle reflection guide to codependence, self-abandonment,  
and coming back home to yourself.*

For the woman who has spent years being there for everyone else,  
and is learning that being there for herself matters too.

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## BEFORE YOU BEGIN

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# Read this slowly.

This is a reflection guide, not a worksheet to complete. There is nothing to fill in and nothing to get right. Some pages you will move through quickly. Others hold a question worth carrying around for a day before you answer it.

If you only have a few minutes, go to part four. Three questions sit there, and they carry most of what the rest of this is built on.

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# First, a little context

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If you grew up with emotional neglect, criticism, inconsistency, or a caregiver who struggled to meet your emotional needs, you may have learned very early to pay close attention to other people.

Their moods. Their needs. Their reactions. Their approval. Their availability.

You may have learned to keep the peace, be helpful, stay small, anticipate what others needed, avoid conflict, or work hard to remain connected.

These were not character flaws. They were ways of adapting to the environment you were in.

But strategies that once helped you maintain connection can become patterns of self-abandonment in adult relationships.

## You may find yourself:

- saying yes when you really mean no
- putting someone else's feelings before your own
- feeling responsible for keeping someone else happy
- over-explaining yourself
- needing reassurance before trusting your own decision
- worrying about how someone will react if you speak honestly
- ignoring your own discomfort until it becomes resentment
- feeling guilty for having needs
- staying quiet to avoid conflict, then feeling unseen or angry
- trying to manage, rescue or fix another person's experience
- looking outside yourself for permission to trust what you already know

And sometimes the pattern goes the other way. You may become so overwhelmed by giving yourself away that you suddenly pull back, shut down, become resentful, or feel a powerful need to reclaim yourself.

Neither extreme is self-authority. Self-authority lives somewhere in the middle.



## Where did I learn this?

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Codependence is not a formal diagnosis, and people use the word in different ways.

Here, I am using it to describe learned relational strategies in which your sense of safety, worth or belonging becomes overly dependent on managing, pleasing, rescuing, or being approved of by other people.

For some people, these patterns begin in childhood. Perhaps you learned:

*If I keep everyone happy, things will be okay.*

*If I don't make a fuss, I won't be rejected.*

*Their feelings are more important than mine.*

*My needs are too much.*

*It's safer to give than to ask.*

Over time, you can become extraordinarily good at looking outward.  
But less practised at asking: *what is happening inside me?*

That is where self-abandonment can begin.

And this matters. Research increasingly links difficult early emotional environments with more difficulty regulating emotion in adulthood, and with less secure patterns of attachment. Emotional neglect and criticism show up in that research as strongly as louder forms of harm. This is a common pattern, and a well documented one.

So if you recognise yourself here, nothing has gone wrong in you. You may simply be very practised at an old way of staying connected.

*A strategy that kept you safe once does not have to keep running the rest of your life.*

### THREE

## The moment to notice

*Am I staying connected to myself right now, or am I leaving myself to stay connected to someone else?*

Try asking yourself this when you notice:

- anxiety about someone's response
- the urge to immediately reply or explain
- guilt about saying no
- a strong need for reassurance
- resentment building
- the urge to fix something for someone
- fear that someone will leave if you speak honestly
- the feeling that you have to make someone understand
- a sense that their mood has suddenly become your responsibility

Then pause. You do not have to make a decision yet.



# Three questions to come back to yourself

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1

## What am I feeling?

Not what I should feel. Not what I think the other person feels. What is actually happening inside me?

2

## What do I need?

Try to keep this simple. Do I need space? Clarity? Reassurance? Rest? Respect? Information? Time? A boundary? Connection? To be heard? To say no?

3

## What am I about to do, and why?

Am I about to say yes because I want to, or because I am afraid of what will happen if I say no?

Am I helping because I have capacity, or because I feel responsible for fixing their experience?

Am I staying quiet because I have nothing to say, or because I am afraid of their reaction?

This is where awareness begins.

## FIVE

# A simple body pause

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When you notice yourself moving into an old pattern, do not immediately try to think your way out of it. Try this first.

- 1 Put both feet on the floor.
- 2 Feel the support underneath you.
- 3 Let your shoulders soften.
- 4 Take three slower breaths, making the exhale a little longer than the inhale.

You do not need to force a deep breath. Just slow down enough to give yourself a little more space. As you breathe, quietly say:

*I don't have to decide this right now.*

*I am allowed to notice what I need.*

*I can choose my response.*

Pause between each one. That is it. You are not trying to make yourself calm. You are creating a moment in which you can hear yourself.

## The high-regard practice

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When you have spent years putting yourself second, holding yourself in high regard can feel surprisingly unfamiliar. So practise it physically.

- 1 Sit or stand with both feet supported.
- 2 Let your spine lengthen, not rigidly, just enough to feel yourself occupying your own space.
- 3 Place one hand somewhere grounding: your chest, belly, ribs or upper arm.

Then say quietly, taking a breath between each:

*My experience matters.*

*My needs matter.*

*I don't have to earn the right to have a boundary.*

*I can care about you without abandoning me.*

Notice what happens in your body. You may feel relief. You may feel resistance. You may feel grief. You may even feel nothing. All of that is information.

You are practising something new: staying with yourself while remaining connected to another person.

## SEVEN

# When have I overstepped my own boundary?

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Sometimes we think of a boundary as something we set with another person. But there is another question: where have I overstepped my own?

Perhaps you:

- agreed when you didn't want to
- stayed longer than you had capacity for
- gave more than you could comfortably give
- ignored something that didn't feel right
- kept explaining after you had already said enough
- took responsibility for someone else's feelings
- allowed repeated behaviour that you knew was not okay
- abandoned your own plans to accommodate someone
- expected yourself to tolerate something you would not ask another person to tolerate

*What did I know, somewhere inside me, before I talked myself out of it?*

*What would respecting myself look like now?*

## One step back to self-authority

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You do not have to overhaul your relationship today. Choose one small thing, something you can say, do or request that brings you back into alignment with yourself.

- | I need some time to think about that.
- | I'm not available for that.
- | That doesn't work for me.
- | I need you to speak to me differently.
- | I'd like to finish what I was saying.
- | I understand you're upset. I'm still not changing my answer.
- | I would like some reassurance.
- | I'm willing to talk about this, but not while we're shouting.
- | Or simply: let me come back to you.

I do not have to justify myself into worthiness. I do not have to make the other person agree. I do not have to make my boundary comfortable for everyone.

Self-authority begins with listening to that true inner voice, and then acting on what you hear.

## NINE

# A final reflection

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Take a moment before you finish. Place your feet on the floor. Feel yourself here. And ask:

*Where have I been working too hard to maintain connection?*

*Where might I be asking someone else to give me something I have not yet learned to give myself?*

*Where am I ready to stop abandoning myself?*

*What would it look like to stay on my own side today?*

## This is a spiral, not a straight line

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Self-abandonment does not disappear because you finally learn to set perfect boundaries. It changes through hundreds of small moments in which you pause, listen inwardly, tell yourself the truth, and choose not to betray what you know.

You may at times find yourself moving into old ways of being. You may still people-please. Still over-give. Still become frightened of someone's disappointment. Still forget yourself sometimes.

That does not mean you have failed, or that you are not progressing. Like many transitions, none of it is linear. It is more a spiral dance. You circle around, going a little deeper in different situations. Sometimes you notice you moved differently. Sometimes, suddenly, an old move appears. And you go deeper into noticing.

It means you are learning a new way of relating. Moving from:

*How do I keep connection with the other person even if it means I compromise quietly?*

towards:

*How do I stay with myself while I am in relationship with this person, in a way that feels true to me too?*

And that is where self-trust deepens and begins to feel freeing.

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You are allowed to belong to  
yourself.

If you recognise yourself deeply in any of these pages and would like support, you can book a call directly from my website. There is a free grounding and clarity call, and a paid call if you feel you are really struggling right now. I am right here with you.

*Go gently, go lightly.*

Mellanie Xx