



LET'S TALK ABOUT

RESISTANCE

Presentation by Gabriele Lichtkind

Disclaimer

I am sharing this presentation as a peer rather than a professional.



I am not a therapist

I am simply drawing on my own personal experience for this presentation. The responsibility for what you do with this material rests with you at all times.

Introduction

In the brain retraining world, there is a lot of talk about resistance: the fact that we often find ourselves unwilling or unable to do what might be right and helpful for us, even though we should know better.

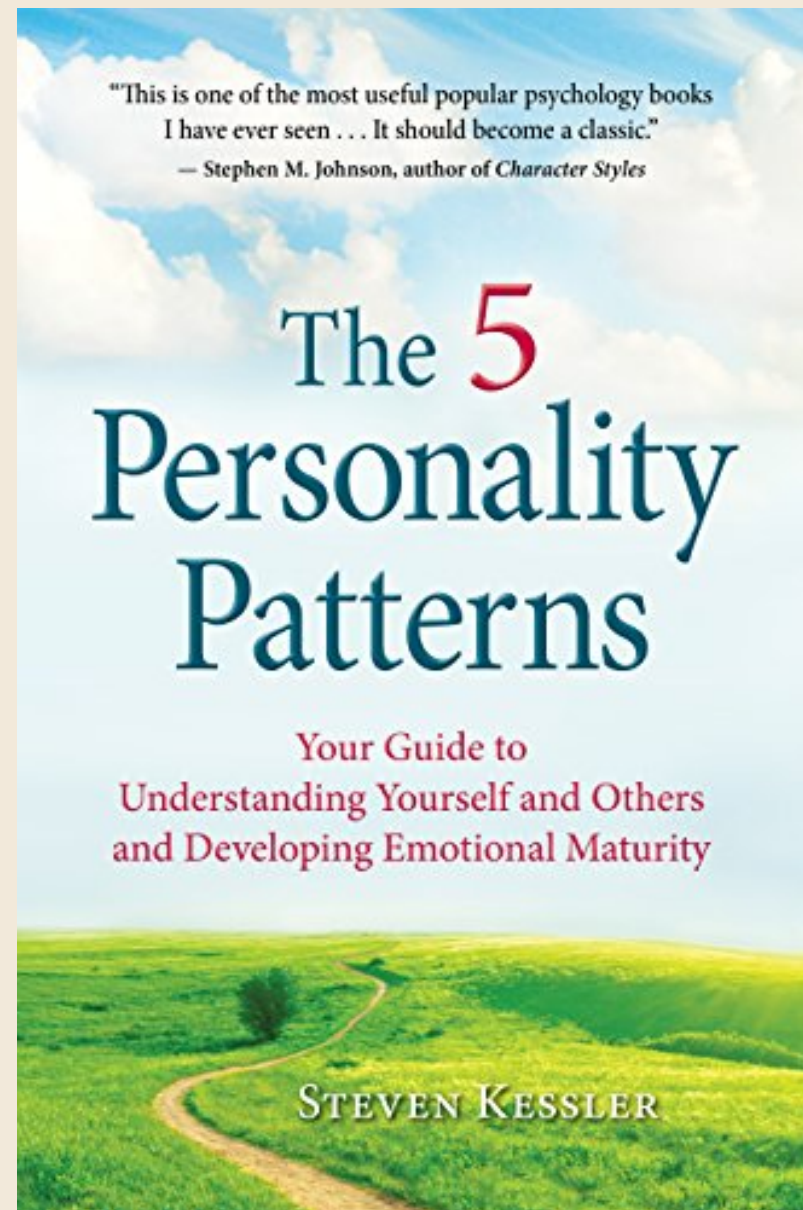
There seems to be an inner mechanism that prevents us from acting in our own best interest, and sometimes even from acting at all.

This mechanism is called resistance.



Intro 2

Recently I have come across this book by Steven Kessler:



"The 5 Personality Patterns - Your guide to understanding yourself and others and developing emotional maturity"

Intro 3

Kessler explains the concept of resistance in a way I had not come across before, which helped me understand better what resistance actually is, the guises in which it can appear, and how the pattern of resistance might have developed in the first place.

A more intimate knowledge of resistance can help you to recognise when resistance shows up in your life (it is not always as straightforward to spot as it may at first appear), and it will enable you to meet your resistance in a more conscious and constructive manner, so that in time it will stop silently fuelling your behaviour in the background. This is why I would like to share my insights with you.

Intro 4

For this presentation, I am drawing on Kessler's book (unless otherwise stated, references refer to his *5 Personality Patterns*) as well as my own personal insights and life experience.



Overview

In this presentation, we will cover:

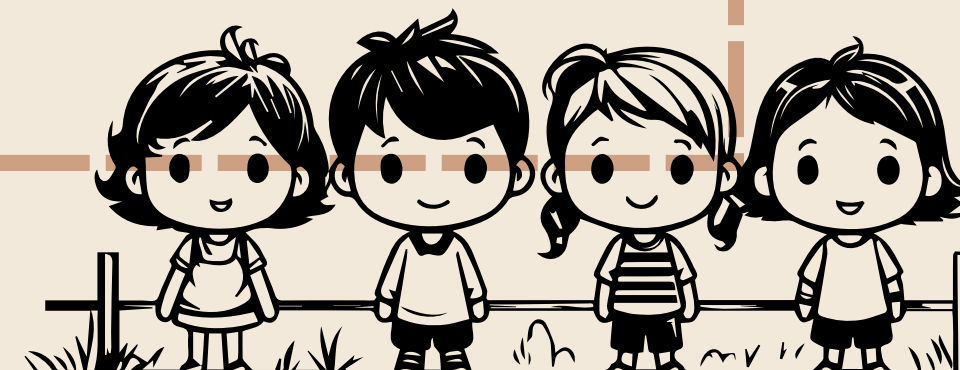
1. Resistance as a survival strategy - How you learn to resist rather than flow with your life force
 2. Real-life examples of how and why resistance becomes a way of life
 3. How to begin breaking the pattern of resistance, enabling you to act more in alignment with yourself and work in your own best interest rather than allowing resistance to sabotage your life
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Stages of child development

From conception through childhood,
each individual goes through certain stages of development.

These developmental stages build on each other, that is, what we learn in Stage 1 serves as the foundation for the skills we are going to acquire in Stage 2. Stage 2, in turn, is the prerequisite for our learning in Stage 3 and so forth.

Sometimes the learning from a developmental stage is disrupted or incomplete, for example because of stress, trauma or lack (missing experiences). This can have knock-on effects further down the line, as we will see.





In his book, Kessler looks at five developmental stages. The most relevant of these for the topic of resistance is Stage 3, so we will look at this in more detail in a moment. For context, however, here is a brief outline of the preceding Developmental Stages 1 and 2:

Stage 1: Embodiment

This is the time in the womb from conception to birth when the soul comes into the body. Ideally, at this stage we claim our physical body and start to inhabit it.

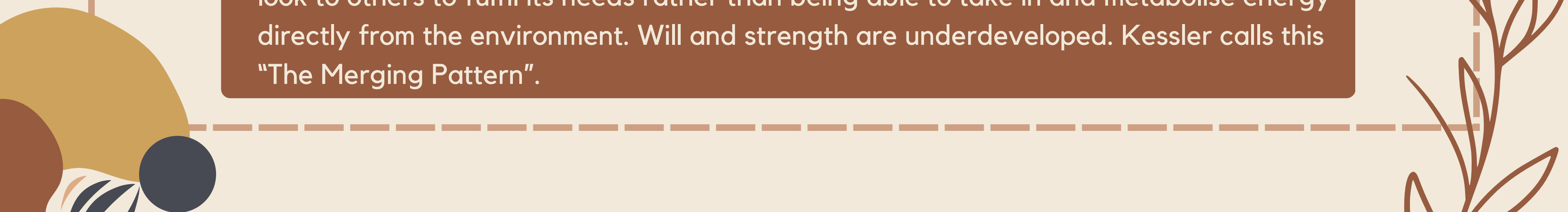
If this process is disrupted for any reason, the person may later have trouble being fully present in their body. They may experience reluctance towards the earthly life and exhibit a tendency to withdraw into the realm of spirit, mind and fantasy rather than living fully in and through the body. They adopt a survival pattern that Kessler calls "The Leaving Pattern".

Stage 2: Receiving and taking in

This stage, which lasts roughly from birth to about the age of 2, is about the taking in of nourishment. Here, "nourishment" not only refers to food but also to time, attention, human warmth and connection, being lovingly held, appropriate stimulation etc.

There is a cycle of need (for example hunger) -> asking for and receiving nourishment (food) -> having one's fill until satisfied (until the child pushes away of its own accord because it is full) -> peace and contentment are reestablished, child can self-reference

If the child experiences too often that it will not receive until it is full and happy, it may later have difficulty trusting life to meet its needs. It may also struggle to hold sufficient energy in the body to draw on for taking action in the world (not "full of itself"). It will look to others to fulfil its needs rather than being able to take in and metabolise energy directly from the environment. Will and strength are underdeveloped. Kessler calls this "The Merging Pattern".



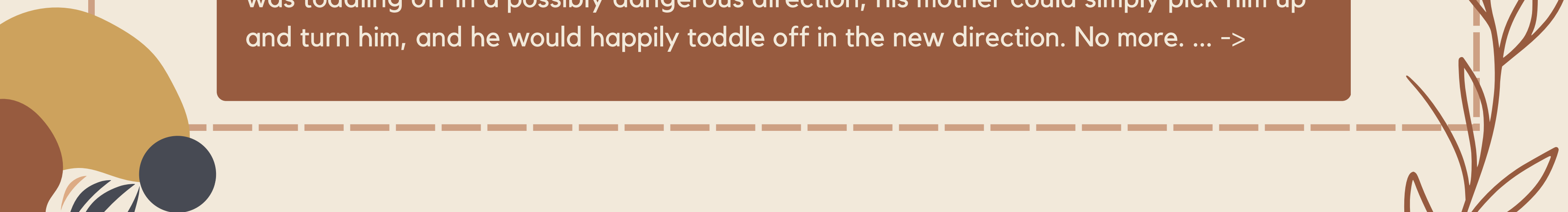
Stage 3: Expressing the self

Remember: This is the stage at which resistance can begin to take hold as a survival pattern, so we will look at it in greater depth.

From about the age of 2, a sense of self begins to emerge in the child's psyche. The child learns to distinguish between "me" and "not me", and it attempts to express itself in thoughts, feelings and actions, to act and do things for itself, in its own way and on its own schedule.

Kessler gives a beautiful example of this in his book (177):

"For the first time, his own will arises and he begins to express it. At 18 months, if he was toddling off in a possibly dangerous direction, his mother could simply pick him up and turn him, and he would happily toddle off in the new direction. No more. ... ->

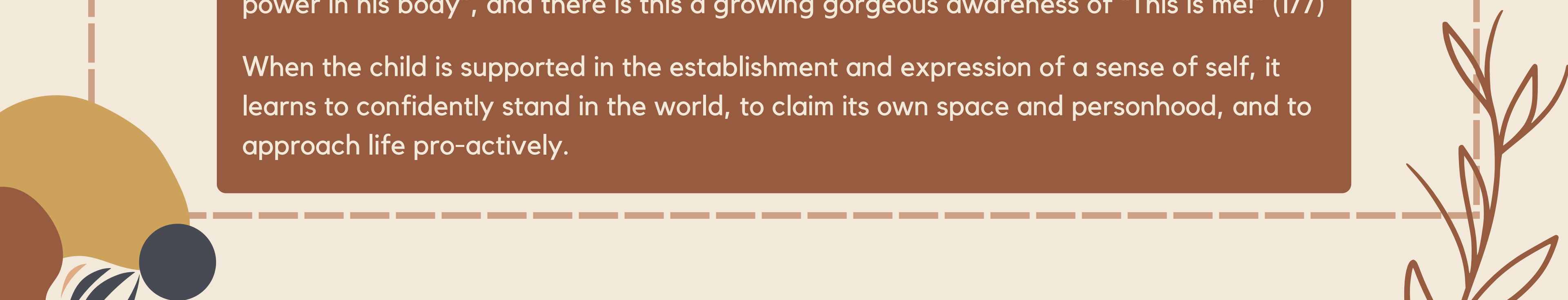


Stage 3: Expressing the self

Now when his mother picks him up and turns him, he turns back. He feels the change as a challenge to his own budding will, and he asserts his own will by turning back and continuing in his original direction. And so the battle of wills begins. He has entered the 'terrible twos'."

This stage is "focused on the development of autonomy and a separate self. The child begins the psychological process of separation from the mother and begins to want to do things for himself, in his own way. He delights in saying 'No' just to feel that amazing power in his body", and there is this a growing gorgeous awareness of "This is me!" (177)

When the child is supported in the establishment and expression of a sense of self, it learns to confidently stand in the world, to claim its own space and personhood, and to approach life pro-actively.



Stage 3: Expressing the self

However, imagine what happens if, rather than receiving and nourishing the child's powerful new drive for self-realisation, the caregivers instead do one or more of the following:

- thwarting or punishing the child's attempts at self-expression
 - rushing the child or dictating to it
 - forcing the child to accommodate other people's rhythms rather than accommodating the child's natural rhythms
 - over-controlling the child or acting too intrusively, giving the child no space of their own
 - claiming for themselves anything the child creates ("what my child did" rather than "what you did")
 - treating the child as one of their possessions rather than a separate human being
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Stage 3: Expressing the self

If a child at this age, who has a natural drive for acquiring the skills of self-awareness and self-expression, is met too often and/or too forcefully in such ways, i.e. in ways that punish, shame or repurpose the child's expression of self, the child may adopt a strategy of hunkering down and enduring as a means of psychological survival rather than freely and openly putting itself out into the world where it will only be taken away from itself. Kessler calls this "The Enduring Pattern". "Hunkering down and enduring" mainly takes the form of

HIDING
and/or
RESISTING



HIDING / RESISTING

The child may eventually decide to give up because it cannot win against the overpowering might of the adult(s). The drive of "How can I win?" then becomes "How can I avoid losing?" (183)

One of the ways to avoid losing is to retreat within. In order to keep itself safe from shame, punishment or being taken over, the child learns to bury its own energy underground. It hides its own self-expression from others - and even from itself:

Some caregivers reach so far into the child's psyche that it seems like there is no safe place anywhere for the child. It may feel like 'Whatever I know, THEY know', (183) so the child has to hide itself so deeply in the ground that it is even hidden from itself. This, of course, makes it very hard for the child to feel, know or get in touch with itself; it may even lose itself. It might need to learn or relearn as an adult how to become aware of and reference its own self and core (see tools and exercises later on).



HIDING / RESISTING

Another strategy to avoid losing is to resist. The child's efforts to put itself and its nascent personal power out into the world are being hijacked, trampled on or stamped out. Therefore, the only power left to the child is that of refusal to cooperate. In order to protect and preserve its emerging sense of self against attack or takeover by its caregiver(s), the child adopts an attitude of "You can't make me". (197) It starts to resist for its psychological survival in the world.

The truly catastrophic fact is that the child's resistance is not only directed others but also turns against the child itself:

HIDING / RESISTING

- “In one last act of autonomy, he turns his own will inward to suppress his impulse to act and fight: he defeats himself.” (183)
- “I will defeat myself before you can defeat me. I will make myself lose small before you can make me lose big.” (191)
- “The mechanism that should attack what is invading the self instead attacks the self.” (198)
- You begin to automatically resist impulses from the inside, i.e. your own impulses to move and act. “You can’t make me” turns into “Even I can’t make me.” (197)

Resistance can become a way of life, something you do by default to protect yourself against constant perceived threat: “I am No. I am Refusal. I am Shutdown. There is no part of me that is Yes.” (184) Rather than really living, you are constantly resisting life out of a perceived need to ensure your survival. Ingrained resistance makes it very hard, of course, if not impossible, to say Yes even to things that are beneficial for you.

HIDING / RESISTING

Even more paradoxically, ideas that originally came from you can quickly begin to feel as if they came from someone else, so you start to resist them. You may often find yourself stuck or paralysed, literally unable to act even on your own impulses because of unconscious resistance that looks something like this:

"Mom broke my will and implanted her own. Any exercise of will serves her, not me." (198)

You may resist acting in your own best interests because it can look to you as if you are satisfying your caregiver's needs rather than your own if you make a success of your life. ("Look at what my daughter has achieved" rather than "Look what you have achieved".) In order to preserve your own sense of self, you cannot make the other person happy because to do so would mean that they take you away from yourself again.



HIDING / RESISTING

This leaves you in a tie. If you make yourself happy, you make the other person happy, too. You may unconsciously resist the fulfilment of your own dreams and desires just to avoid the other person claiming it for their own again.

Alternatively, you may not even be conscious any longer of what is your dream and what is someone else's: "I refuse. I will destroy your plan, or even my plan, since it might be your plan. I can't differentiate between your plan and my plan." (188)



HIDING / RESISTING

This mechanism keeps you in destructive loops, part of which is also the inability to forgive others for any injuries they have caused you, even though you would like to forgive because the memory of the transgression(s) you suffered hurts you and prevents you from moving on; it may even wreak havoc with your body and your health. But here is what goes on in your psyche:

You think that if you do forgive the other person, you hand yourself over to them completely, you give yourself up and deliver yourself unto the enemy. You may feel that if you forgive the other person's transgression, you abandon and betray yourself, giving them permission to walk away with your body and soul. So in order to protect yourself, you simply cannot allow yourself to forgive. It is a classic double bind ("Damned if you do, damned if you don't"): You are left with pain and suffering both if you DO forgive and also if you DON'T forgive. There is no way out, or so it seems. You feel caught.

HIDING / RESISTING

Kessler gives a particularly stark and poignant example of this, quoting one of his clients (183):

Mom said: 'I own you and everything you do.'
I will not forgive.
I swore an oath to never surrender.
My only weapon is to hurt myself, to disappoint her.
This is my prison.

If we flesh this out and 'translate' the meaning of each sentence, the mechanism of what goes on here may become a little clearer:



HIDING / RESISTING

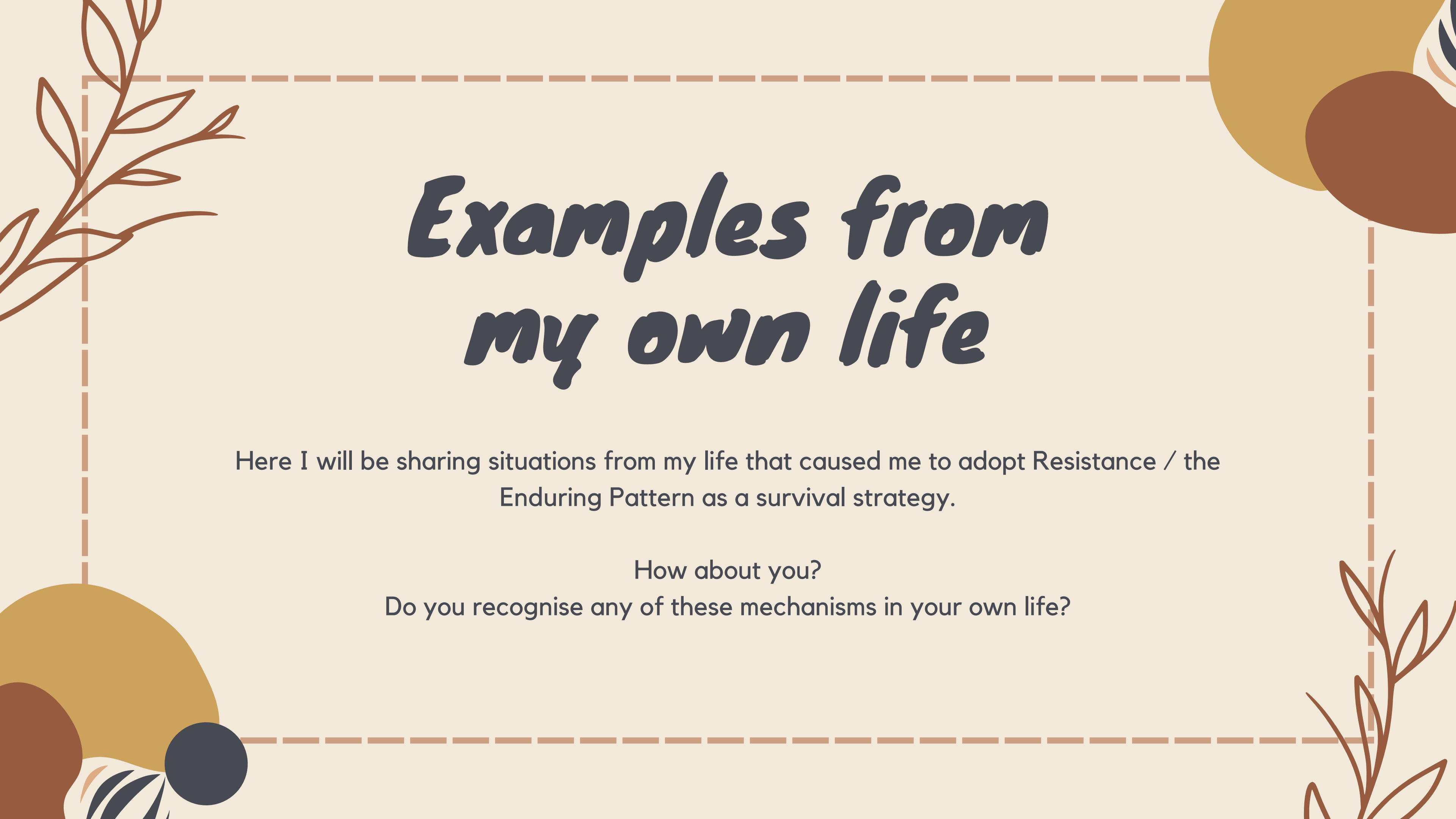
1 - Mom said: 'I own you and everything you do.' Meaning: *If I forgive her, I give in to her. She owns me completely then.*

2 - I will not forgive. *This is the only power I have: of refusal, of resistance.*

3 - I swore an oath to never surrender ...because my survival depends on it. *This is my final defence, the last bastion. I can't give this up, so I can't forgive what was done to me.*

4 - My only weapon is to hurt myself, to disappoint her. *When I hurt myself, I hurt her because she owns me. When I let myself down or disappoint myself, I let her down and disappoint her. It is the only weapon at my disposal (or so I think).*

5 - This is my prison. *It is a catch-22, a double bind. I am damned if I do forgive (because she owns me completely then), and I am damned if I don't forgive because then I am forever caught in replaying the wound and hurting myself with it. The prison is: I have to keep hurting myself in order to have any power at all, to have any self left to myself.*



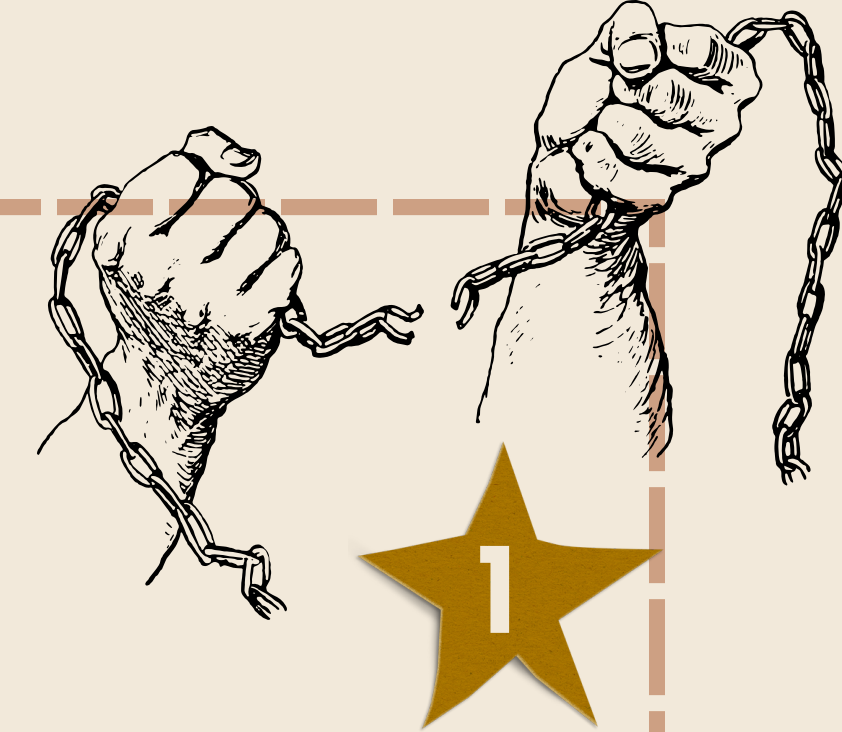
Examples from my own life

Here I will be sharing situations from my life that caused me to adopt Resistance / the Enduring Pattern as a survival strategy.

How about you?

Do you recognise any of these mechanisms in your own life?

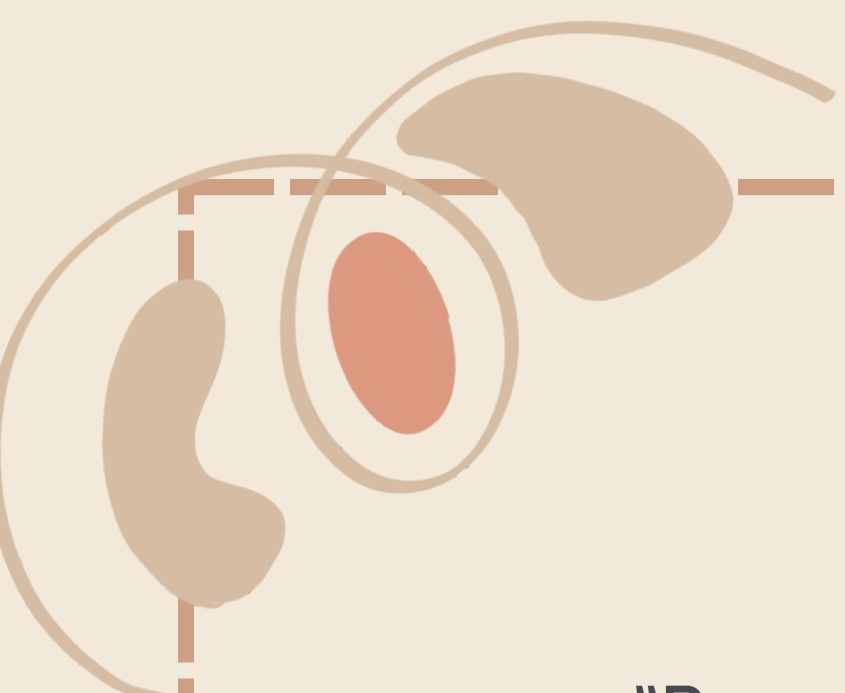
So, how do you break out?



As we have seen, when resistance is used as a survival strategy, is a pretty tough pattern to be caught in because is so self-perpetuating, keeping you stuck with seemingly no way out. But you can break through it. In a moment, we will look at some practical ways how to do this.

But first, here is a quote from Kessler that I have personally found instrumental in my healing, even though it is highly uncomfortable and perhaps even deeply contentious for some:





Steven Kessler (176-177):

“Remember that each child has his own level of sensitivity to each kind of difficulty, and what feels deeply wounding to one child may hardly be noticed by another. Some say that we are each most sensitive to the difficulties that help us learn whatever we need to learn to accomplish our life purpose. So the process by which a child develops any of the survival patterns is not a one-way street. It is not a story of simply being the victim of cruel and brutal parents, although sometimes it seems so (especially in the creation of this particular pattern). It may also be seen as a collaboration in which both parent(s) and child learn through their experiences whatever they are trying to learn. I emphasize this to give you some perspective [...].”



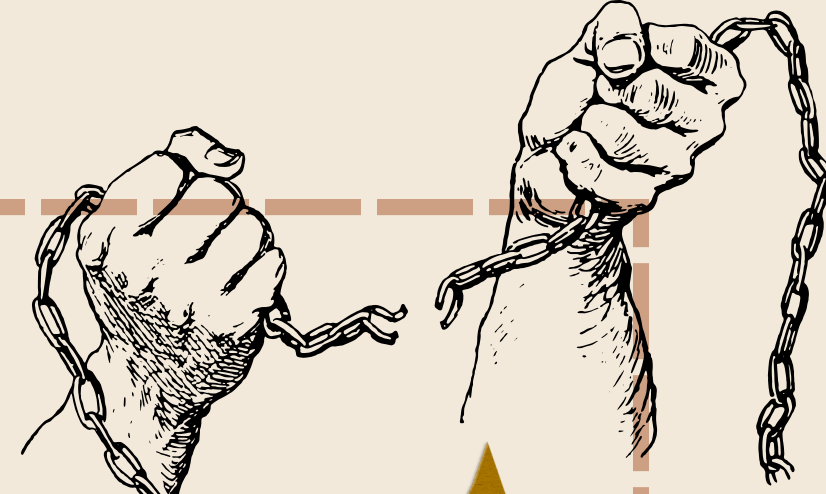
A learning task?

When you realise that it might be you who keeps yourself caught in this pattern (rather than other people or 'fate'), you can engage your will to come out of it.

This is part of:

- Differentiation: Realising that you are an independent adult who can make up their own mind, rather than being bound by what others did to you
- Empowering yourself by assuming self-responsibility, accountability and autonomy, and by learning to exercise your will

Even just by being aware that there may be a learning task involved here for me frees me up to think outside of my old pattern of behaving. It allows me to turn around from the position of being merely a victim and look at where I have a chance to act differently. It gives me incentive to let go of my pattern of resistance and find alternative ways of looking at my situation. An example:



My own personal story

My mother having told me that I was an unplanned and unwanted child:

"I cannot forgive you because the hurt runs too deep.

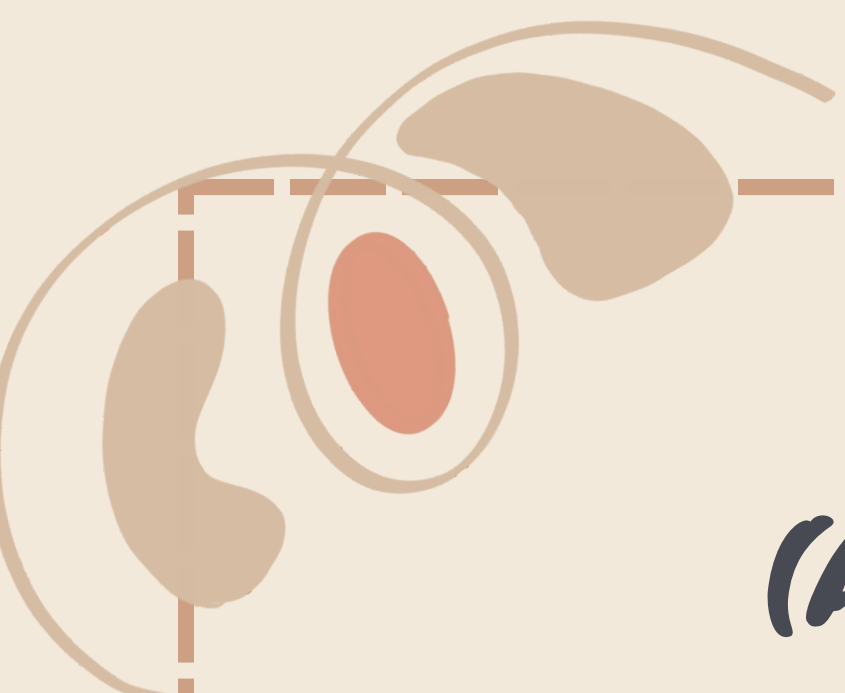
You have wounded me too grossly, too much.

If I forgive you what you did to me, I kill myself."

Remember that your mother may not even be aware of having hurt you. What is exceedingly injurious to some may not be a problem at all for others. My mother will derive her own learning from the situation (the fact that I rejected her because of what she told me). What she makes of this is not up to me; looking after her learning is not my job.

My task is to ask: What is MY learning? I am still trying to figure that out but it could be something to do with having to pull myself up by my bootstraps and rise to the many and considerable challenges I am facing, becoming bigger and stronger than I am; personal growth, stepping into my will and power.



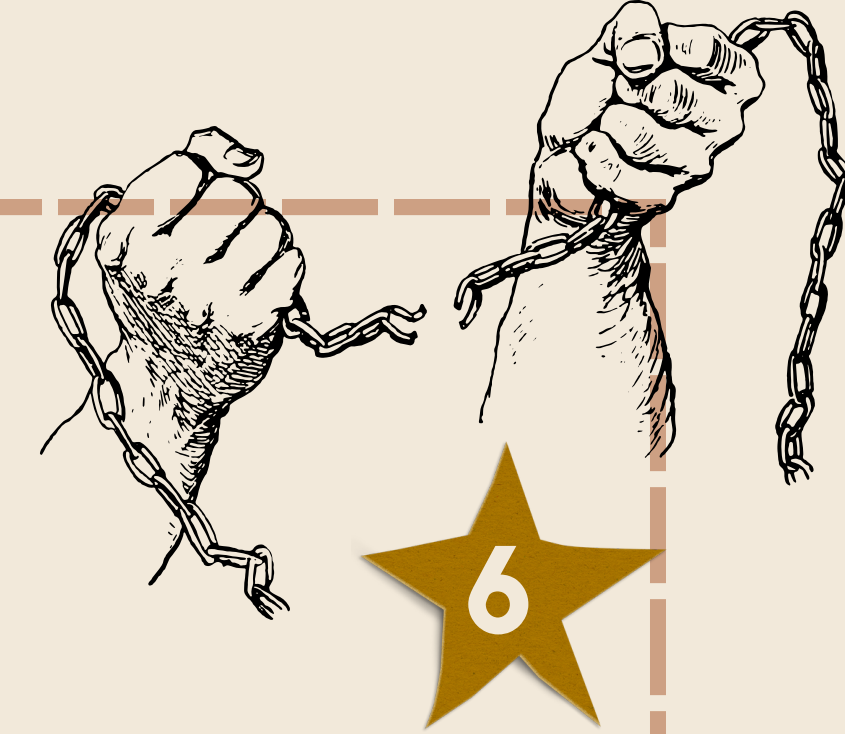
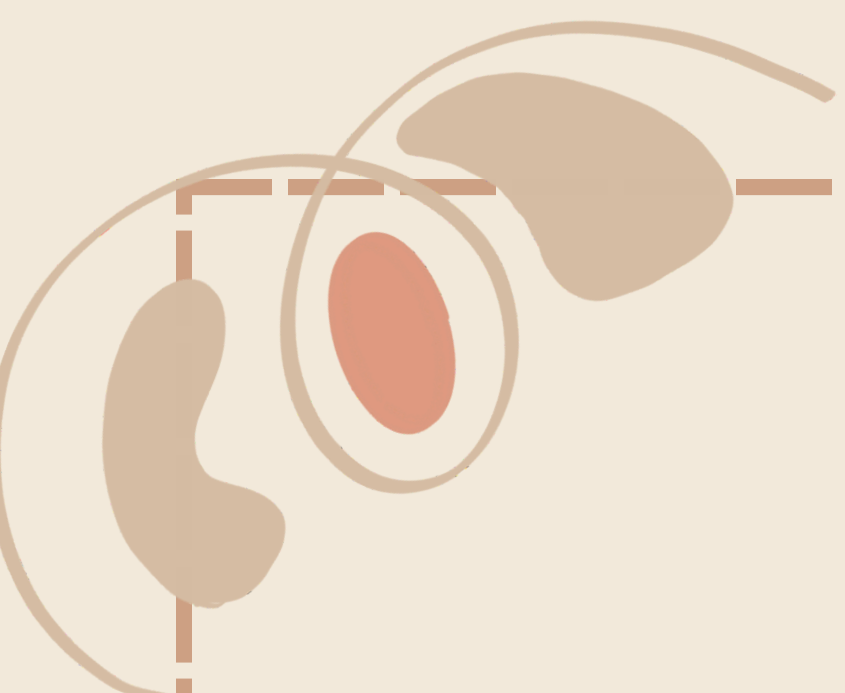


SELF-EMPOWERMENT ***(Accountability, responsibility, will)***

Realising that it might be me who keeps herself locked in this position opens up my mind a crack, giving me a little room - and, most of all, the incentive - to look for different ways of handling the pain and turmoil raging inside of me.

Instead of being stuck in the old hurt and patterning, I begin to look how else I could respond in this situation. And suddenly, rather than droning on about the injustice I suffered and finding myself unable to break out of the anger, desperation and need for retribution, I come up with the following alternative scenario, finding myself able to entertain the idea that I may be willing and capable of responding in a different way:





An alternative perspective

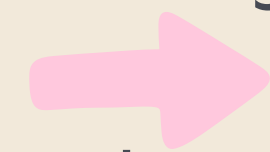
What if I manage to look at the situation like this:

By letting the wounding go, I set myself free.

This not the same as pretending that the wounding never occurred.

"Forgiving" and letting go means seeing clearly what happened **WITHOUT IT**
HAVING ANY BEARING who I believe I am, on how I see myself as a person, on
how I feel about myself.

Suddenly I no longer define myself by what happened to me (the wounding incident).



I AM NOT WHO THE WOUND SAYS I AM.



I am free to choose *for myself* - to choose how I see myself, who I believe I am, what
I make of myself and who I elect to be.





Knowing that I tend to resist
because I am hunkered down in an effort to preserve my sense of self,
I can find the courage to dare and do something different for myself,
something that is actually in my favour.

I dare to come out of resistance for resistance's sake.

I can dare to do things that are good for me, things I enjoy, things that feel nice,
rather than having to hold on for dear life to the old hurt, anger and resentment.





Practical suggestions for

Breaking the pattern





Breaking the pattern

Come into the present

The first thing to do when you notice that you have gone into a pattern of resistance (and/or a stressful memory) is to bring yourself into the present. Remind yourself that you are now an adult with more knowledge, insights, skills, capacities, resources and power than you had as a child. Come into the here and now, using the breath, energy skills, spirit helpers/friends etc.

"I am here now"

This is a practical exercise that can help you come into the present:
Say to yourself (out loud, if you like, to strengthen the energy): "I am here right now" to bring yourself into the moment. As you do so, project your energy outward into your own space (your energy field, your aura) knowing that it nurtures the energetic bubble around you.





2

Breaking the pattern

Move your body

Moving your body gets your energy moving, which helps you to shift from hunkering down and resisting to letting your energy flow outward. Moving your hips can be particularly beneficial because often much muscular armouring is held there.

Moving can also feel like an act of defiance, self-reclamation and self-assertion when you are in the resistance/endurance pattern!

Practise energy skills

- Developing core (feeling and referencing your central channel). Nourishing it, for example, by having a cup of tea JUST FOR YOU)
- Grounding (feeling your feet on the ground and how the earth supports you)
- Somatics: Mindful movement to connect with yourself
- Differentiation (learning to discern what is me/not me), realising you are an independent adult with your own thoughts and feelings
- Boundaries (staking out, filling and defending your own space) - two practical exercises for this will follow in the next slide:





Breaking the pattern

Fill your space

Learn to fill your space with your own energy. Ways of doing this:

- The so-called doubt shout ("Kee-aii!")
- Breathing practices (find what works for you)
- Stating "I am here" in an embodied way, using your felt sense.

When you send your energy outward, intend that it fill your personal bubble and remain around you, rather than dissipating.

Boundaries

Practise defending your space and boundaries:

Using movement / words / sounds, respond to intrusion by actively using your will, strength and other resources to push or keep out intruders out and defend your space.

You can use past memories for this.





4

Breaking the pattern

Claim (for) yourself

Make it okay to feel what you feel. Give yourself permission to feel all of your emotions and sensations, giving them space and expression, even just for and within yourself.

Also, fully register how you feel about things and allow yourself all of your experiences, your likes and dislikes. For example, if you see something you find beautiful, allow yourself to absorb the sensation of finding this thing beautiful.

Think freely

When in the presence of your caregivers, or people who behave like them:

- Practice deliberately thinking freely in your own mind
- Narrate your true feelings to yourself; as you go along
- Carve out moments for yourself to take a breather, to regroup and to connect with yourself again

All of this will help you to stay connected with yourself, rather than going underground. (Gibson 2019)





Breaking the pattern

Exercise your will

Get in touch with what YOU actually want for yourself and for your life. Search your heart for your desires, visions, dreams and values. Then dare to state from all of you, with as much clarity and conviction as you can muster, what it is you choose for yourself. Exercising your will in this way is a big part of learning to express yourself!

You can also do a whole ABC (PTers):

ABC

A: Take a moment to become aware of what you are feeling. (This tool is all about getting in touch with you.)

B: Be completely honest about your feelings, allow them to be. And *allow yourself* to feel what you are actually feeling. Do not fight what is present right now. Sense into your body how these feelings feel physically and where you feel them. If you just reject the feeling and go straight to 'the good', you are spiritually bypassing. Once you are in touch with what is there, **ONLY THEN** do you move on to

C: Decide what you choose, making a statement and declaration of your own will.





Breaking the pattern

Moving toward a goal

Consciously set yourself goals you want to work towards. Celebrate every little accomplishment along the way and feel the satisfaction and validation at having achieved. Allow yourself to truly celebrate and enjoy the feeling when you have reached your end goal! This helps you gain confidence in your self and your strength.

Safe space & support

Seek out relationships, communities, environments, teachers or mentors you can trust to be yourself with and who you can safely practise expressing yourself towards. Find people who can help you set manageable goals for yourself, and who can encourage and guide you as you gradually learn to bring yourself out into the world more.





Breaking the pattern

Expand your world

Know that the way you were raised is only one very small and extremely limited window on the world. See it as simply one of an endless number of possibilities of looking at life and yourself. Find people who are more aligned with your own heart, mind and soul and use them as reference for how to understand human experience and how to express yourself in the world. (You may already know some.)

Higher love & support

Either use (if you already have one) or build a positive, nurturing relationship with a higher power that you can call on at any time, knowing that this spirit guide/friend is always there for you and extends nothing but love and goodwill to you. This kind of relationship is particularly useful because it is available at any time, it will never forsake you or let you down, and it is completely attuned to YOU, and ONLY you.





General notes 1

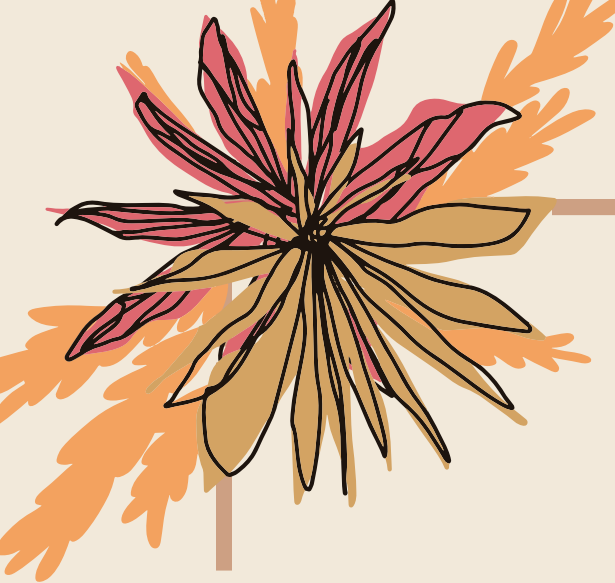
Working with your Adult Main Personality (AMP)

When using these tools, be mindful to practise them from your Adult Main Personality (AMP) rather than your part(s). A 'part' can be the position of a scared or helpless child, for example - all of us have any number of different 'parts' living inside of us, according to Internal Family Systems. Essentially, parts are memory structures, ways in which we once learnt to handle life and its problems that may, however, no longer offer appropriate strategies or solutions today. (King 2024)

AMP is a term taken from Dr Cathleen King (www.primaltrust.org). It denotes a voice within, a kind of consciousness that speaks like a gentle, competent adult who can handle anything. Imagine a parent that you as a child would feel completely comfortable and safe with and who you would fully trust in any situation, even a crisis, because they are always loving, calm and accepting and have the capacity to do what is needed in the way that is best for you. All of us have this Inner Adult within us but it may not always be fully developed. With practice, we can grow and expand this aspect of ourselves, so that it becomes a valuable resource for us.

When you do the tools from the AMP rather than your parts, the AMP can see the larger picture and help lift you out of the often one-dimensional and limited approach of your part(s).





General notes 2

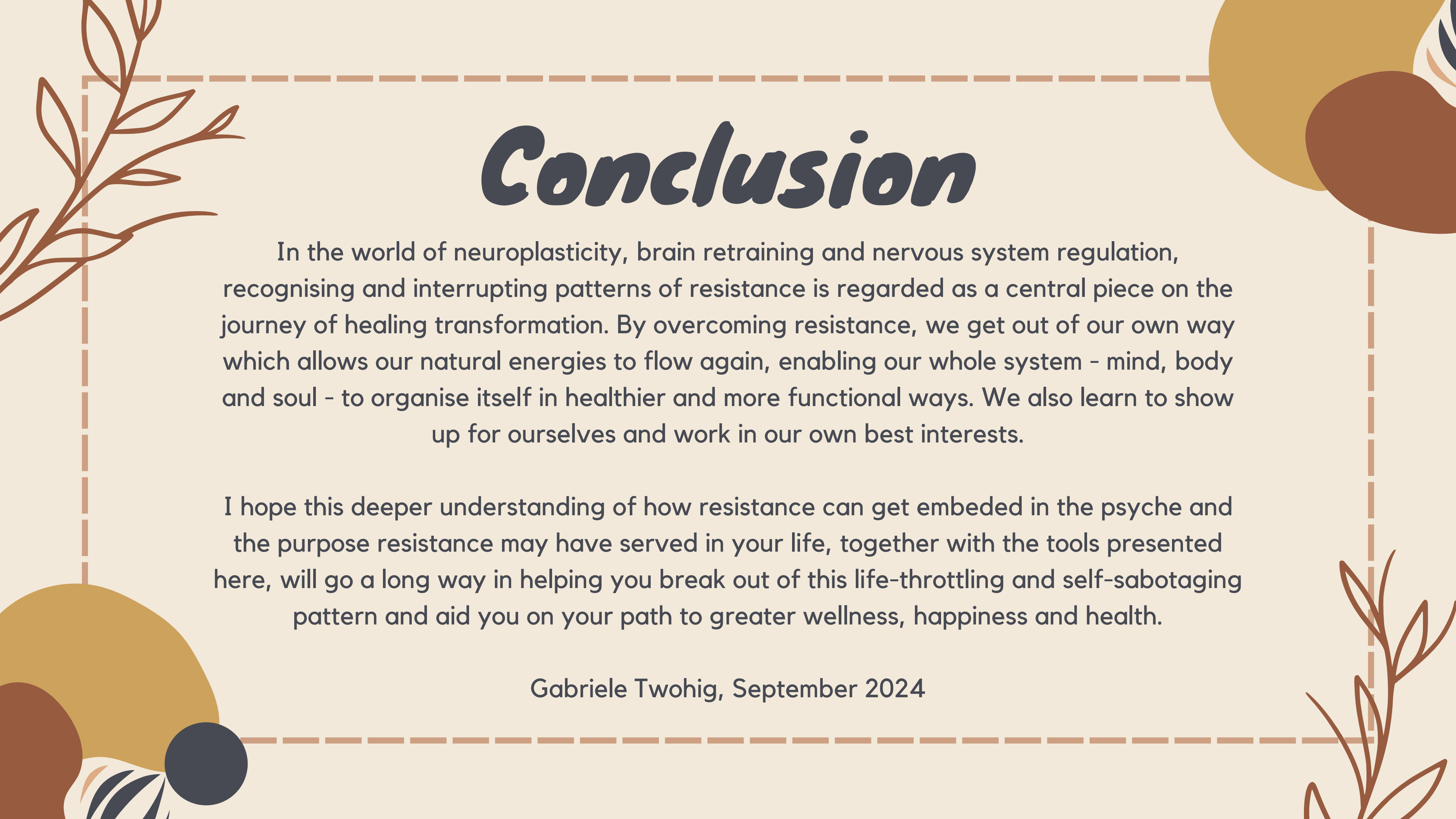
The inner critic

Realise that the inner critic is not your own voice but rather the internalised voice(s) of caregivers and other people in authority from the time you were growing up. One way of dealing with the inner critic (when it pipes up and eats holes into what you do) is to notice it, then clearly and firmly tell it that you are hearing it but that you have decided not to talk to yourself like that anymore and that you are not having anyone else talk to you like that, either. Deliberately turn yourself deaf to the inner critic and practice coming up with different things to say to yourself instead - positive, supportive, nurturing and encouraging things.

Treat yourself with compassion

This is a tough pattern to be living from and a hard one to break. The journey is not easy. Recognise this and always be compassionate towards yourself. Reward yourself for your efforts to find a better life for yourself. Acknowledge the courage and patience required and frequently praise yourself even just for trying.





Conclusion

In the world of neuroplasticity, brain retraining and nervous system regulation, recognising and interrupting patterns of resistance is regarded as a central piece on the journey of healing transformation. By overcoming resistance, we get out of our own way which allows our natural energies to flow again, enabling our whole system - mind, body and soul - to organise itself in healthier and more functional ways. We also learn to show up for ourselves and work in our own best interests.

I hope this deeper understanding of how resistance can get embeded in the psyche and the purpose resistance may have served in your life, together with the tools presented here, will go a long way in helping you break out of this life-throttling and self-sabotaging pattern and aid you on your path to greater wellness, happiness and health.

Gabriele Twohig, September 2024

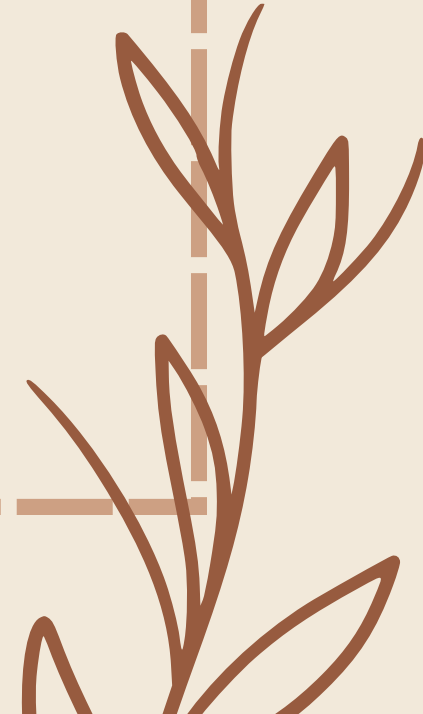


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THANK YOU