



Not Again! Tame Your Fiercest Patterns

Not again! Despite your best efforts, your fiercest pattern has you in its claws. Your current relationship is turning out just like the last three, or your bank account is empty, or some other area of your life is in complete disarray.

In that moment of grim recognition, your Inner Critic piles on the shame and “shoulds,” saying that everyone else has this figured out and you are obviously not trying hard enough. On top of the pattern itself, you feel desperation about your inability to fix it.

Hold still, move in. When my cat hooks my hand with her claws, I hold still and move my hand toward her to get unhooked. The same idea works with a recurring pattern.

Hold still by naming the experience you are having right now in its rawest form:

- "I am having the experience of not getting what I need."
- "I am having the experience of not being seen."
- "I am having the experience of my boundaries being violated."

What words convey your experience? Pause. Breathe. This is where you are right now.

You are not alone. We each have a unique set of strengths and tools to apply to our problems. Some problems yield so easily that we barely notice them, and we wonder why others do not manage them as well as we do. Some problems require a lot of hard work, but the progress is clear.

A few leftover problems are unaffected or even exacerbated by our particular strengths and tools. Those become our recurring patterns. We all have them.

Next time your Inner Critic tells you to try harder, remember that you are doing your best with the resources you have. Since your tools do not fix this problem, holding still and naming the experience could be your best option.

Move in. Now that you gained a sliver of relief by naming your experience, move in and unhook the claws by becoming a world expert in your pattern. Study it with interest. Consider keeping a lab notebook for your observations.

You experience this pattern a lot, and you already know a lot about it. You probably have a long list of attempts that have not worked. Honor your efforts! In science, negative results are just as important as positive results.

With kind curiosity, look at how the pattern has started and run its course in the past. As much as you can, skip over fault, or blame, or who was right and wrong. Simply look at what happened and how you responded.

Study the present as well, noticing your sensations and emotions when you are in the grip of the pattern. What happens in your body as part of this experience you named?

Notice the changes. Every time the pattern comes around, it can seem as if you are trapped in a loop which will never change. At the same time, you continue to acquire new information, skills, and awareness. You are on a spiral rather than a loop, moving through the pattern slightly differently each time. Take note of even the smallest differences. Think back a few years or ask a compassionate friend, and you may realize that the changes add up to big shifts.

Also remember that “never” and “forever” are flashback markers. Unprocessed traumatic memories can

mysteriously draw similar events into your life in an effort to heal. As you hold still and move in toward the pattern, the traumatic memories have an opportunity to integrate into ordinary narrative memory.

Trust your senses. As an expert, you are sensitive to the merest hint of the pattern. Your Inner Critic may accuse you of projecting it into the world. Revisit that list of all the fixes you tried. Trust that you are not secretly trying to make yourself miserable. If you are sensing the pattern, there is a good reason.

Watch your pattern in action. As painful as it is to see a pattern coming and be unable to change it (this time), the act of observation is already a change. Pause. Breathe. Name your experience moment by moment, including the frustration and despair of being in the pattern again. Bring in as much gentleness and support as you can.

Hidden strengths. Recurring patterns highlight your weaknesses and at the same time show your hidden strengths. Is it easy for you to intuit and follow someone's wishes (even though you want clearer boundaries)? Is it easy for you to relax and not sweat the small stuff (even though you would prefer to know where your keys are)? You may not be getting the results you want, but there is still ease there. As you become an expert in your pattern, notice and celebrate your strengths.

Tame, not banish. We want to banish our fiercest patterns, but we have to learn to live with them instead. When we name and study our experiences, we get clawed less when patterns recur. As they become tamer, we may even come to grudgingly appreciate them.