

When we get **in our own way**

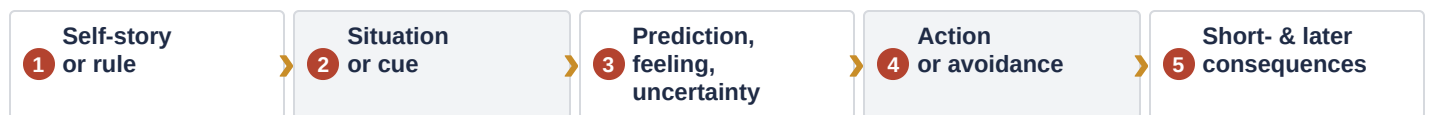
Map one pattern with curiosity, then look for one place to respond differently.

A pattern, not a character flaw.

“Self-sabotage” is a non-diagnostic label some people use for patterns that can work against their goals or wellbeing. It is not a settled explanation of intent. This sheet is a reflection tool, not a diagnostic tool. The map below is one possible contextual formulation—not a universal causal model—and not every box fits every time.

Use this in session or on your own. Choose one recent, safe, manageable example. Skip anything that does not fit; you can pause or choose a smaller focus if the topic feels too distressing.

1 A FIVE-STAGE MAP — fill in the blanks for your own situation.



1 Negative self-perception and limiting beliefs

A critical view of yourself as not good enough or not deserving—and the “rules” that follow, such as “I’m too old to change careers.” Such stories may be shaped by earlier experiences and become a quiet story we keep telling ourselves.

The story I notice: _____

2 The triggering situation

An event that stirs a strong stress, threat, or avoidance response—a review at work, a social gathering. Triggers are personal.

What happened: _____

Feeling / body: _____

3 Fear of failure—or another uncomfortable prediction

Worst-case thinking that ties your worth to the outcome: self-doubt, perfectionism, procrastination, or avoiding the challenge. Fear of failure can be one part of this stage, but is not the only possibility.

What I predict: _____

4 The action and what it may do for you

Putting things off, negative self-talk (“I always fail”), or goals set too high or too low. An action may bring short-term relief, distraction, or a sense of protection.

What I do: _____

What it may help me avoid: _____

5 The consequences

Possible later effects include stalled growth, strained relationships, lower self-esteem, or more stress. Sometimes the cost can seem to confirm the story in stage 1—and the loop can turn again.

What happens later: _____

Possible influences—not a single root

A **low self-concept** (worth that rises and falls with what others say), **internalized beliefs** absorbed from parents, teachers, or peers, a **fear of the unknown and change**, or an **excessive need for control** can feel familiar. Present circumstances and social context can matter too. **Optional reflection:** Which feels most familiar, and where did it start? You do not need to find the root before trying one change.

One small, different response

You do not have to change every belief—or feel confident—to begin.

Notice	PAUSE	Reframe	FAIRER VIEW	Respond	ONE STEP
Name the trigger and the “what if” that came with it. The urge to avoid is a signal, not a fact about you.		Try a fairer, evidence-informed alternative—not forced positivity. “I can’t do it” might become “I can’t do it yet,” when that fits.		Choose a step that is realistic and fits your values. Break it small, remove one distraction, or set one deadline.	
ASK “What just happened—and what belief did it switch on?”		ASK “What else might happen? What would I say to a friend here?”		ASK “What is one helpful step within my control?”	

Choice and pacing: Choose a safe, manageable situation. A small experiment is not a direction to ignore real danger, coercion, illness, disability-related barriers, discrimination, or trauma-related distress; pause and bring those patterns to counseling.

A worked example

A promotion opens up. I think, “I won’t measure up,” and notice a knot in my stomach. I put off the application—short-term relief, until the deadline passes and I tell myself, “See, I never follow through.”

A different response: “I don’t feel ready yet—and the evidence says I’ve handled harder things.” I’ll spend fifteen minutes on a rough draft tonight, before deciding whether to apply.

2 MY MOMENT, IN A FEW LINES

Use your example from page 1. Fragments are fine; leave blanks if needed.

When _____
 I tell myself _____
 I feel / notice in my body _____
 So I _____
 In the moment, this may help with _____
 Later, the cost may be _____

3 ONE THING I’LL TRY

Make it small enough to be doable—not impressive.

When I notice _____
 My feared prediction is _____
 My smallest helpful step will be _____
 Evidence against the old belief / what happened _____
 After trying it, I’ll look for / learn _____

Notice what happened, what helped, and what you would adjust. A painful or missed outcome does not define you; feedback may be incomplete or may take support to interpret.

If the pattern happens again

Mistakes are how we learn. Treat a repeat as something to explore, not another reason to criticize yourself. Where did you notice it—even afterward? Keep a record of what you do well and read it when the inner critic is loud. If you are working with a counselor, bring what happened, not just what worked.