

When we get in our own way

A reflection map for noticing a self-sabotage pattern and finding one place to step out of it.

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. This map is not a verdict about you or a complete explanation of why something happens. It offers one way to notice what may be happening in context.

Use this in session or on your own. Choose one recent, safe, manageable example. Skip anything that does not fit; not every box or sequence will fit every time.

1 A FIVE-STAGE MAP — fill in the lines for one situation



1 Negative self-perception and limiting beliefs

A lasting, critical view of yourself as not good enough, not capable, or not deserving — and the “rules” that follow it, such as “I’m too old to change careers.” It can 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 performance review, a social gathering, or a hard conversation. Triggers are personal.

What happened: _____

Feeling / body: _____

3 Fear of failure — or another uncomfortable prediction, feeling, or uncertainty

Worst-case thinking may tie your worth to the outcome. It can look like self-doubt, perfectionistic concerns, procrastination, or avoiding the challenge altogether.

What I predict: _____

4 The self-sabotage action — and what it may do for you

Common forms include putting things off, negative self-talk (“I always fail”), setting goals too high or too low, or stepping away from a difficult responsibility or conversation. These responses may bring short-term relief, distraction, or a sense of protection.

What I do: _____

What it helps me avoid: _____

5 The consequences

Possible consequences include stalled growth, strained relationships, lower self-esteem, or more stress. The cost can seem to confirm the belief in stage 1, and the loop turns again. An outcome is not a verdict on your worth.

What happens later: _____

Possible influences — not one fixed root

People may notice 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** (routine feels safe, new feels dangerous), or an **excessive need for control** when uncertainty feels hard. Present circumstances and social context can matter, too.

Optional reflection: Which influence feels most familiar? Where might it have been shaped — a critical teacher, comparison with a sibling, or a message from society? You do not need to find an origin 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. A racing heart or urge to avoid is information to notice, not a fact about you.		Examine the negative “what if.” “I can’t do it” may become “I can’t do it yet” when that is true and useful; consider evidence and another realistic possibility. Aim for a fairer view, not a promise.		Choose a realistic step that fits your values. Break it small, remove one distraction, or set one deadline. Focus on the chosen action and learning, while recognizing what is and is not within your control.	
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?”	

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, which feels like relief — but 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 helps with _____

Later, I notice _____

3 ONE THING I’LL TRY

Make it small enough to be doable — not impressive.

When I notice _____

My feared prediction / old belief _____

Evidence against the old belief _____

My smallest helpful step will be _____

After trying it, I’ll look for _____

Notice what happened, what helped, and what you would adjust. What happens may offer information, even if it is incomplete or painful; it is not a defining endpoint.

Choose a safe, manageable focus. This is not a directive to push through real danger, coercion, abuse, discrimination, illness, disability-related barriers, or trauma-related distress. Pause, choose a smaller focus, or bring the pattern to counseling when needed.

If the pattern happens again

No one does this perfectly. Mistakes can be part of learning. Treat a repeat as something to explore, not another reason to criticize yourself. Where did you notice it — even afterward? What would make the next attempt more manageable?

Keep a record of what you do well — kind messages, small wins, things you have already handled — and read it when the inner critic is loud. If you are working with a counselor, bring what happened, not just what worked.