

How to Interrupt Negative Patterns

When unfavorable situations, actions and emotional conflicts happen again and again in your life—same scene, different characters—there's a good chance you are in the presence of a negative "pattern."

Some examples: picking the wrong lovers/partners, constant conflict with co-workers, chronic debting, people-pleasing.

At best, these negative patterns cause frustration. At worst, they cause undue suffering, uphill struggle, sometimes even death.

The good news is: you have the power to change these negative patterns. Below are some ways to begin to disrupt them so that you can start laying down new, more positive patterns.

Become aware.

No matter how entrenched a pattern seems, the act of noticing begins the shift away from damaging thoughts or behaviors. Put simply, you can't change what you're not aware of.

One way to become aware is to just sit with your thoughts and watch for the patterns. The goal here is to notice, that's all.

In this step, focus your awareness on just the facts and feelings of the patterns. Don't let your mind wander into the analysis of "why" you have them right now, for it will likely try to justify and defend the pattern. You can analyze later (see below); for now, just notice.

Also, ask people you trust to help you see the patterns. Our blind spots are called "blind" for a reason; we just don't see them. But they'll be clear as day to others.

Discover the hidden payoff.

Becoming aware of your negative patterns, you see evidence they are

disserving, perhaps even damaging, you. For example, your pattern of conflict with co-workers has gotten you fired several times, and now your resume reflects that pattern, too.

The key to interrupting negative patterns is to understand this: we generally don't keep repeating behaviors unless, on some level, we get something good out of them.

These hidden reasons are known as "payoffs," and they either help you get more of something you want or avoid something you don't want.

In the example above, the person in constant conflict with co-workers could be using the conflict to cover up deep insecurity with his/her work quality. The conflict, in effect, distracts from scrutiny.

Or the conflict could stem from uncensored outspokenness. The person may have an oppressive situation at home, and being excessively frank at work may allow him/her to feel powerful and self-expressed in at least one arena of life.

Look for (and create) positive patterns.

One of the best ways to disrupt the negative patterns that may be wreaking havoc with your life is to also study the positive patterns in your life. For these can be "grafted" onto your negative patterns with great success.

For example, you can utilize the discipline you've always had around working out regularly to stop using credit to finance your lifestyle.

Consider your negative patterns as the pipes to your backyard pond that are old and clogged with mineral build-up. Laying new pipes (positive patterns) could be the easiest, quickest and most effective solution. *

10 Things Your Children Need from You

As much as we might wish for a parenting manual, with exact instructions based on proven scientific methodology, the truth is that parenting is more art than science. Below are 10 basic "art tools" to help children thrive.

- 1. Safety.** Kids don't need over-protecting, but be aware of situations, surroundings and people that could potentially harm them.
- 2. Nourishment.** Educate yourself as to what is truly nourishing and provide that to your children. Everything can be made yummy!
- 3. Time to play.** This is critical for healthy children. It's where they process all they see and experience.
- 4. Love.** Show your love, speak your love and its beam will shine through all parenting missteps.
- 5. Opportunities to struggle.** The most profound life lessons come from facing challenges. Protecting our children from everything difficult actually handicaps them.
- 6. Honesty.** They may not know the specifics of the deception, but kids know when you're lying, and it confuses them deeply.
- 7. Support.** Kids who have to raise themselves often conclude that they can't depend on anyone else.
- 8. Positive modeling.** Work on your own personal growth. Your kids are watching.
- 9. Your belief in them.** Knowing that you believe in their innate goodness and abilities helps create strong, positive self-esteem.
- 10. Time together.** Being in your presence is like balm for children. They soak up sustenance just from being around you. *

A Letter From

Margaret Hood Black



Why do we keep doing the same things over and over again? For instance, saying yes when we really want to say no, drinking more than we'd like, yelling at our kids, keeping crazy busy schedules when our partners want to spend more quality time?

These and any number of other repetitive behaviors usually kick in because of "patterns" that we unknowingly follow. The biggest aids in busting these patterns and laying new, more positive, patterns are awareness and looking for the hidden payoffs.

Yes, the payoffs. We wouldn't repeat behavior if we didn't get something out of it. That's the intriguing topic of this issue's front-page article.

Having awareness continues as a theme through other articles, too. The quiz helps you become aware of how big a role mistrust might play in your life. And the back-page article on conformity suggests you become aware of the ways that "doing what everyone does or what has always been done" could actually be dangerous.

If you're single (and nearly 50% of all American adults are) or you live alone (one in seven do), the page 3 article explores ways to be successfully single and thrive, whether you intend to couple up or not.

And finally, because parenting sometimes feels like a complex topic, this issue's Top 10 article simplifies the landscape with the 10 things your children most need from you.

Please don't hesitate to call, if you need help in these or any other areas.

Do You Have Trust Issues?

Trust comes in different levels and flavors for everyone. For example, one person may completely trust family members, while those may be the last people that another individual is willing to open up to.

It can be difficult to trust if you've been hurt—as a child, in a romantic relationship or in a situation that seemed "out of the blue." Rejection, betrayal or abuse are never easy to deal with.

But sometimes we build such a strong wall around ourselves that we miss opportunities to develop wonderful, healthy and lasting relationships with loved ones, friends and colleagues. Answer true or false to the statements below to discover what role mistrust may be playing in your life.



True False

- 1. I keep my problems to myself.
- 2. I don't like to depend on others; they almost always let me down.
- 3. Revealing my weaknesses to a romantic partner is too risky.
- 4. I tend to expect the worst from people so I won't be disappointed.
- 5. When my partner isn't around, I feel worried, even paranoid.
- 6. I don't rely on anyone other than myself.
- 7. When someone becomes interested in me, I feel suspicious.
- 8. I feel insecure in unknown situations.
- 9. I don't make promises or ask for them.
- 10. I've been betrayed before; I'm not letting that happen again.
- 11. People and situations are never predictable, so it's important to keep my guard up.
- 12. When it comes to making things happen, I'm on my own; it's all up to me.
- 13. I know that I am the only one truly committed to my success in life or business.
- 14. Loyalty never lasts.
- 15. You might be able to trust people when times are good, but forget it when things become challenging.
- 16. There's no one with whom I feel I can completely be myself.
- 17. People are basically "in it" for themselves. There's no such thing as people doing things for others out of the goodness of their heart.

If you answered true to five or more of the statements, you may want to explore your concerns around trusting others. Remember: trust must be earned. But if you don't give others a chance to earn that trust, you may be missing out on fulfilling relationships and a more supported life. *

Successfully Single: How to Thrive on Your Own

In 1950, only 22 percent of American adults were single. Today, more than 50 percent are single—a massive demographic change.

This means that over the course of their lives, many people will spend a significant amount of time being single—by choice, by divorce, by death, or just in between relationships.



Interestingly, being married or coupled still tends to garner more status. But single people everywhere lead rich and fulfilling lives.

And while the word *single* suggests "being alone," many single people have vast networks of friends and family and are not alone or lonely in the least.

If you find yourself single, temporarily or for the foreseeable future, here are some tips to help you be successfully single and thrive. (And really, these are useful tips even if you are partnered!)

Develop your relationship with yourself.

When coupled, it's easy to focus on your partner rather than yourself. Take this time being single to develop a loving relationship with you! Treat yourself as well as you want a partner to treat you.

If you decide you want to be coupled in the future, your self-love and self-esteem will be the blueprint for the amount and quality of love you can receive from another person.

View being single as an opportunity.

Being single, you have the freedom to make choices based on your own desires, without having to include or accommodate another person's needs.

Find out what inspires you, what makes you feel alive and passionate. Have you always wanted to live abroad or go back to school? Take a class or join a group that interests you?

If you want to meet new people, you're most likely to find compatible friends (and possible partners, if you want) while doing what you love. When you're happy, you're most likely to attract people with similar energy.

Take risks; get out of your comfort zone.

While you may not be used to eating in restaurants or traveling alone, challenge yourself to try new things. Many people report that they meet more people and attract more interesting opportunities while traveling on their own.

Spice up your life with new experiences. It may be scary at first, but the aliveness factor makes it worth the risk!

Nurture your relationships with friends and family.

Deep love and connection come in many forms. Often when you're coupled, friends and extended family take a back seat.

Use this time to give all your relationships the time and energy they deserve to make them thrive, and you will feel loved, connected and appreciated.

Create a supportive community.

In times past, connection to community was an integral part of life. Less emphasis was put on finding fulfillment primarily from a spouse. These days, many people long to enjoy the support and joy a strong community provides. Take this time to develop a loving community. You may be single, but you are not alone.

Cultivate your connection to Spirit.

Many people find deep sustenance from their connection to Spirit, or through spiritual or religious activities of various kinds. This may be the perfect time to develop a sustaining spiritual path. Explore whatever gives you a feeling of connection to something bigger than yourself.

Follow these tips and you will be well on your way to living a joyous life. As Florence Falk says in her book *On My Own: The Art of Being a Woman Alone*

(and this can just as easily apply to single men):

"Aloneness is an opportunity, a state brimming with potentiality, with resources for renewed life—not a life sentence...it is where we have the opportunity to discover that we are not a half but a sovereign whole." *



The Danger of Conformity

"Conformity is the jailer of freedom and the enemy of growth." —John F. Kennedy

We humans tend to be like pack animals—safe in our herds. We don't like to stand out too much; at a primal level, it feels unsafe.

So we conform to generally accepted standards of behaviors, attitudes and beliefs within our herds, and we mostly expect others to as well.

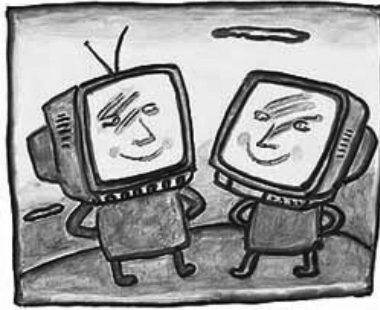
A 75-year-old woman is not likely to dress like a 15-year-old, for example. She doesn't belong to that tribe and may be alienated by her own if she were to dress like that.

Most of the time, we don't even realize we are conforming. We do what others do *because others do it*, not because we have consciously and thoughtfully chosen it. It's just "what is done." Or we conform because of pressure and expectations.

Is conformity all bad? No, of course not. It's not a bad thing to stop

at red traffic lights or drive on the correct side of the road.

So when does conformity become dangerous? Below is a look at four ways conformity could be detrimental to living a full and meaningful life—*your* life.



When conforming deletes your passions...

Everyone in your family goes to college and becomes doctors or lawyers or other professionals. You want to go to cooking school and become a baker, but you

go to college instead and get on the "right track," majoring in finance.

When conforming negates your healthy instincts...

As a brand new mother, your instincts scream that your baby should sleep in bed with you, or at least in a crib right next to it. Yet night after night, you close the door to your baby's room and endure 20 minutes of his crying because "crying it out" is what you're "supposed" to do.

When conforming squelches your truth...

You've known you were gay since childhood, but to acknowledge it would crush your family and your career. So you don't. Your entire life feels like a lie.

When conforming harms other people or animals...

You've always gone along with your friends who like to harass ethnic minorities. Now they're planning a hate crime.

Bullying, abusing, acting on dangerous ideologies and much more can bring harm to others, physically or psychologically.

What's missing from the equation in dangerous conformity is critical, free thinking. We so cling to our groups that we miss discovering what we, *ourselves*, truly think and truly want.

The good news is that our true selves never really go away. They lie in wait for the day they can be set free to live the passionate, authentic, inspired life for which they were created. *

For more information on her services, please feel free to call: 713-562-7819.

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Margaret has two offices conveniently located
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