Understanding my protective response

Individual Emotionally Focused Therapy reflection | Adults and teens 12+

Use this with your counselor to explore a moment when connection felt difficult. The aim is to understand your response with care, not blame yourself or decide what someone else was thinking.

Choose a manageable example. You do not need to describe trauma. Pause, draw, or leave any part blank.

The moment I noticed a shift

What happened that I could see or hear?

What meaning did my mind make of it? This may be different from what happened.

How I tried to protect myself

Possibilities: going quiet, arguing, pleasing, seeking reassurance, leaving, working harder, or another response. A response may have helped you get through something.

What I did, wanted to do, or stopped myself from doing

What did that response help with in the moment? What happened afterward?

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What I can explore without forcing it

A feeling I noticed first, or a word I am trying out

You do not have to find a deeper or "real" feeling. Several feelings can coexist, and not knowing is a valid starting point.

Making room for a need

Continue with your counselor

What felt important

If it fits, consider what you feared, missed, or hoped for. Needs might include comfort, belonging, respect, choice, reliable support, or protection.

A feeling or concern I want understood, including uncertainty

What I needed then, or what I need now

A more caring way to speak to myself

Try words you could believe, not a positive statement you have to force. For example: "It makes sense that I wanted support. I can take a little time before responding."

Words I would like to hear or practice saying to myself

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A possible request or boundary

Only if safe and useful: "When _____, I notice _____. I may feel _____. It would help to _____."

My own words, or a boundary I would prefer

You do not need to contact the other person. If there is intimidation, abuse, or danger, plan for safety with your counselor instead of practicing vulnerability with that person.

One small next step

What I want to practice or bring back to counseling

Original reflection. This is not an official EFIT protocol, a diagnostic tool, or a substitute for therapy.